

Code of Conduct for Child Safety

What is a Code of Conduct?

All staff and volunteers who work with children are expected to interact with children in a mature, capable, safe, caring, responsible manner, with a high level of accountability. This Code of Conduct describes how adults will interact with children and the boundaries we expect them to observe. By being vigilant in following the Code of Conduct, we will help protect children from abuse. The most effective way to reduce the abuse of children is to be vigilant.

Accountability

All adult staff and volunteers are responsible for giving and accepting feedback from others in order to maintain our high level of professionalism. As an adult working with children, you agree to interact with the children by observing these principles. We expect that you understand your responsibility to observe the interaction between adults and children. When you see interaction that is questionable, inappropriate or crossing a child's boundaries, you are to intervene on behalf of the child. Such intervention may include:

- Remaining present with the child to provide him/her a sense of security;
- Redirecting the child to join other children in a different area;
- Speaking to the adult and stating the boundary violation you have observed and reminding them of the responsibility to abide by this code of conduct.

In all cases, violations of this Code of Conduct shall be reported to the director of children's ministries. Such a report shall be handled with the highest degree of confidentiality.

You also give permission to the other adults in our programs to take these intervening actions if you are observed crossing safe boundaries or violating this code of conduct.

Visibility

All work with children shall be planned and carried out in a way that minimizes risks. This includes being visible to other adults when working with children. Adults shall not be in a room alone with a child when the door is closed. Additionally, adults may not be in any area of our property that is secluded or hidden from view.

If a child with a disability requires assistance for personal hygiene or for the safety of that child or others, there may be the need for an assigned “buddy” or caregiver. Such interactions should be as visible as possible. The adult should also inform a leader or another adult that they need to assist or care for the child and ask that someone remain nearby to provide as much accountability as possible.

Overcoming Isolation

To protect our children, staff, and volunteers, an adult should never be alone with a single child where others cannot observe the interaction. We expect adults to reduce isolation by maintaining a minimum of two children present at all times. Parents should also be informed of any meeting you wish to have with a child, and interaction must be limited to times and/or locations where your interaction with the child is visible to others. Isolation can be overcome, for example, by taking two or more children to the bathroom together, dropping off siblings last in a carpool, or taking your own child or spouse along when providing rides. We expect an adequate number of adults to supervise youth events, especially overnight activities.

When ministry to a child involves one-on-one contact, the following procedures shall be followed, as applicable:

- Always be accountable to other adults regarding your interactions with youth or children by informing the ministry leader and or parents when, where, and for how long your one-on-one interaction will take place.
- The activity must be in a public place that is visible to others, never in a private or secluded location, such as a room with the door closed or in a home alone with the child or student.
- Counseling or other necessarily confidential meetings with children shall be done in an office with a window in the door and only when another adult is in close vicinity, aware that the meeting is occurring, and willing to stay in the vicinity until the meeting is complete; and
- Parents and/or supervisors are to be notified beforehand of any activities with youth or children.

In an emergency, find someone to join you as quickly as possible or notify an available adult.

Parent Involvement

Parents are responsible for knowing where their children are at all times. Therefore, parents shall be informed of planned activities. Parents shall be encouraged to make unannounced visits to program activities to reduce isolation and monitor interaction between adults and children.

Supervision

Supervision reduces risk. Program administrators and leaders shall periodically and randomly inspect classrooms, offices, work areas, and other areas where children and adults are together.

Technology

Technology should be used appropriately to protect children and youth from abuse and exploitation. Volunteers and staff shall not engage in social networking, texting, or any other means of private communication with children and youth without the permission of the parent or guardian. Electronic communication between adults and minors should include a parent or another adult and must never be erased. Additionally, this content must be available for review upon request by the parent, ministry leader or pastor.

Discipline

Discipline should be used to teach and correct rather than punish. It must never include slapping, hitting, shaming, yelling at, or belittling a child.

Touch

Because healthy, caring touch is valuable to children, but unhealthy touch is abusive, the following guidelines apply:

- Touch shall be open rather than secretive.
- A hug in the context of a group is very different from a hug behind closed doors.
- Touch should be in response to the child's need and not the need of the adult.
- Touch should be age-appropriate and generally initiated by the child rather than the adult.
- Touch should be with the child's permission, and any resistance from the child should be respected.

- Touch should always communicate respect for the child.

Adults should avoid doing things of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves, including personal hygiene and bathroom breaks, dressing, bathing, etc.

Adults and other youth or children should not hit, slap, pinch, push, hold against their will, or otherwise assault children. Children with special needs may exhibit more aggression than other children as part of their developmental progress. When a child with a disability shows aggression, the behavior is likely not intentional or willful. Care will be given in these situations to ensure all children are cared for and safe.

There may be the occasion when the “buddy” or caregiver of a child with a disability will need to provide appropriate touch. Such touch should be supportive, caring, and with the intent of helping the child return to a safe, secure, and calm state.

The following signs of affection are generally appropriate within specific contexts: verbal praise, side hugs, shoulder-to-shoulder hugs, pats on the shoulder, back, or head (when culturally appropriate). For smaller children, it is often safe to touch their hands, faces, shoulders, and arms. Additionally, these children may be comfortable with a safe adult placing their arms around their shoulders, hugging them, or holding them when others are present.

The following behaviors between staff or volunteers and children are inappropriate and shall not be allowed: touching buttocks, chests, genital areas, or thighs; showing affection in isolated areas or when alone with a child; sleeping in bed with a child; inappropriate comments that relate to physique or body development; flirtatious or seductive looks; any form of affection that is unwanted by the child; showing sexually-suggestive videos or playing sexually-suggestive games with any child; any behavior that can be interpreted as sexual.

Adult members shall monitor each other in the area of physical contact, helping each other by pointing out anything that could be misinterpreted.

Showing Favoritism

Adults shall avoid favoring or showing differential treatment to a particular child or youth to the exclusion of others.

Adults shall not give any child or youth gifts without requesting and receiving permission from a parent or legal guardian.

It is somewhat natural for children and adults with disabilities to form meaningful attachments to one or two individuals. An adult's extra attention to a disabled child or adult can appear to be showing favoritism or singling out these individuals. When such

attachments are created, it is crucial to monitor those interactions to ensure proper boundaries are maintained.

Verbal Interaction

Words such as praise, positive reinforcement, and appropriate jokes can support and encourage a child. Inappropriate verbal interaction includes shaming, belittling, humiliating, name-calling, using harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate the child, cursing, or making derogatory remarks about the child.

Inappropriate verbal interaction also includes telling off-color or sexual jokes, making sexually suggestive comments, telling inappropriate secrets, or inappropriately discussing sexual encounters or desires with children.

Reporting of Abuse

When anyone has reason to suspect, receives a disclosure of, or knows about child abuse within the scope of the work and ministry of **NAME OF THE CHURCH**, he or she must make a report according to our Reporting Protocol. This includes abuse that happens while engaged in church activities or abuse outside the church, such as at school or youth-serving organizations. The Reporting Protocol is attached.

Children with Disabilities:

Because our church is committed to ministering to children with disabilities, we must consider some of the challenges developmental differences create. Therefore, we have to allow assigned “buddies” or caregivers the flexibility to address the need for care and safety when that time comes. For purposes of this Code of Conduct, any such flexibility applies only to situations that involve a child who has a diagnosis of disability from a licensed professional. We understand that there will be occasions when caring for these children will require more individual interaction and attention. In some cases, one person assisting the child may be the best way to help that child return to a safe, secure, and calm state. There could be times when that interaction will be less visible for a brief time. When visibility is restricted, the adult must ensure a high level of accountability to others for the interaction. Those situations will be delineated throughout this document.

Code of Conduct Acknowledgment Form

I acknowledge that I have read and agree to follow the **NAME OF THE CHURCH** Code of Conduct. I have read and agree to abide by the **NAME OF THE CHURCH** Reporting Protocol. In addition, it is my responsibility to read and comply with any future updates to any and all of our child protection documents.

I affirm that I have never engaged in any inappropriate activity with a child, including child abuse. I affirm that if I am accused of and/or investigated for child abuse, I will disclose this to the ministry director or the supervising elder of the ministry and provide documentation of the accusation and investigation outcome. I understand that this disclosure will be shared with church leadership as confidential information. I agree not to engage in any such behaviors.

I further agree that as an individual who has engendered trust from a child, I will not tolerate physical, emotional, or sexual child abuse or neglect.

I understand the importance of accountability to the other adults who work with children. Therefore, I give my permission for anyone who observes inappropriate or questionable interactions between a child and me to speak to me regarding their observation. I will not take offense when approached by someone with concerns about my interaction because I understand that each child's protection must be my priority.

In accordance with our Reporting Protocol, I agree to immediately report to the appropriate leadership any reasonable suspicion of or disclosure of inappropriate behavior between an adult and a minor or between two minors when one has power over the other by age, development, or physical abilities.

Name

Date

Position

Supervisor's Signature

Pending Approval