

Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church is committed to providing a safe, nurturing, and secure environment in which adults and children may worship our God, walk together in love, and work to build up the church and reach out to the world. Unfortunately, the pernicious nature of sin is such that even in a church setting, some individuals may be at risk of being physically or sexually mistreated or abused.

To assure that Grace remains a safe place, the Session adopts this Safe Church Policy. Grace does not tolerate sexual abuse or misconduct including molestation, or physical misconduct in the workplace or at any activity sponsored by the church or related to it. To effectuate this Policy, the Board of Trustees shall adopt and maintain procedures requiring background checks, setting prudent limitations on the interactions between adults and children, and mandating annual training.

Definitions

“Child abuse” means harm or threatened harm to a child’s health or welfare that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment, by a parent, a legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child’s health or welfare or by a teacher, a teacher’s aide, or a member of the clergy.

“Child neglect” means harm or threatened harm to a child’s health or welfare by a parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child’s health or welfare that occurs through either of the following:

1. Negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care.
2. Placing a child at an unreasonable risk to the child’s health or welfare by failure of the parent, legal guardian, or other person responsible for the child’s health or welfare to intervene to eliminate that risk when that person is able to do so and has, or should have, knowledge of the risk.

“Misconduct” means alleged behavior that is offensive to the person upon whom it is inflicted or clearly inappropriate in a church setting and may not reach the legal standard for the definition of abuse or neglect.

“Physical misconduct” means alleged physical harm or threatened physical harm to a child or an adult, or offensive physical contact that is clearly unacceptable within the church community. Physical misconduct is sometimes a single event, but more often a chronic pattern of interacting with a child or an adult.

“Sexual abuse” means engaging in sexual contact or sexual penetration with a child or incapacitated adult or unwelcome sexual contact or sexual penetration with an adult.

“Sexual exploitation” includes allowing, permitting, or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution, or allowing, permitting, encouraging, or engaging in the photographing, filming, or depicting of a child engaged in a sexual act.

“Sexual misconduct” includes sexual suggestion, sexual touching, and sexual activity between or among individuals outside of marriage and especially between or among supervising and subordinate employees or staff.

Employment & Volunteers

Any applicant for employment or for a volunteer position who has perpetrated child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or physical assault will not be allowed to serve in any positions that may put others at risk. A person may be determined by Grace to have perpetrated child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or physical assault even in the absence of criminal convictions.

Safe Church Team

The Safe Church Team will consist of the Board of Trustees and/or its designate and shall consist of at least one male and one female member. Employees and staff shall ordinarily not serve on the Safe Church Team. The members of the Safe Church Team shall regularly be identified to the congregation.

The Safe Church Team shall investigate all reports of sexual abuse and misconduct, and physical misconduct as discussed in the next section. In appropriate instances, the Safe Church Team may retain independent third parties to conduct an investigation.

The Safe Church Team shall identify an individual responsible for addressing and responding to any media inquiries regarding any allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct, and physical misconduct involving Grace Fellowship.

The Safe Church Team shall maintain records of child-abuse allegations reported at Grace.

The Safe Church Team shall be responsible for recommending policies and procedures to reduce the risk of child abuse at Grace and Grace-sponsored and Grace-affiliated events.

The Safe Church Team shall assist in providing information and training of the congregation on the Safe Church Policy, Grace's associated procedures, recognizing signs of abuse, and appropriate response and behavior when working in church ministry.

The Safe Church Team shall have such additional related duties as are, from time-to-time, assigned by the Session, the Board of Deacons, and the Board of Trustees.

Reporting Procedure

All employees, staff, and volunteers who learn of or witness sexual abuse or misconduct or physical misconduct occurring at Grace or at a Grace-sponsored or Grace-related activity must immediately report it to the Safe Church Team. Anyone else who learns of or witnesses sexual abuse or misconduct, or physical misconduct occurring at Grace or at a Grace-sponsored or Grace-related activity is strongly encouraged to report it to the Safe Church Team. The Safe Church are to be regularly identified to the congregation as a resource for anyone in the body who has learned of misconduct.

Grace takes allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct, or physical misconduct seriously. Once the Safe Church Team receives a report, it will promptly investigate to determine whether there is a reasonable belief to believe that sexual abuse or misconduct, or physical misconduct has been committed. The investigation may be undertaken by the Safe Church Team or an independent third party.

The Safe Church Team, in conjunction with the Session, may place the subject of the investigation on an involuntary paid leave of absence if the person is employed by Grace or reassign that person to responsibilities that do not involve personal contact with individuals or children while the investigation is

ongoing. The Safe Church Team may reassign a volunteer subject to an investigation to responsibilities that do not involve personal contact with individuals or children while the investigation is ongoing.

To the fullest extent possible, but consistent with Grace's legal obligations to report suspected abuse to appropriate authorities, Grace will endeavor to keep the identities of the alleged victims and the subjects of any investigation confidential.

If the investigation gives reasonable cause to believe that child abuse or child neglect has occurred, the Safe Church Team will report the incident to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. If upon investigating the report, the Safe Church Team concludes that there is reasonable cause to believe that sexual abuse or misconduct, or physical misconduct has occurred, it shall promptly report its conclusions to the Session. Legal standards applicable to criminal proceedings such as "beyond a reasonable doubt" do not apply to investigations by the Safe Church Team.

The Safe Church Team does not have the authority to discipline any alleged perpetrator. That authority rests with Session and the civil authorities.

All persons directly or indirectly involved with incidents of abuse or misconduct are exhorted to act with honesty, charity, discretion, and confidence in God's justice, His forgiveness, and His healing mercies.

Retaliation Prohibited

Grace prohibits any retaliation against anyone, including an employee, staff member, volunteer, or visitor, who in good faith reports sexual abuse or misconduct, or physical abuse, alleges that it is being committed, or participates in the investigation. Intentionally false or malicious accusations of sexual abuse or misconduct, or physical abuse are prohibited.

PROCEDURES

Unless otherwise inapplicable, these procedures apply to all activities occurring on Grace property that involve children, youth, and vulnerable adults. These procedures are designed to provide boundaries to protect all who participate in Grace's children and youth ministries. Specific ministries that these procedures apply to include, but are not limited to, nursery, Sunday School, youth group (onsite and offsite), boys clubs, girls clubs, small groups, and children's Bible studies.

Background Checks

Background checks shall be performed annually on all staff, Sunday School teachers, nursery workers, youth group leaders, and others who will be in a position of authority or regular contact with a child or incapacitated adult.

Two-Adult Rule

There must be at least two unrelated adults present when supervising one or more minor students. This rule is designed for the safety of adults as well as minors, and is required across all ministry areas with few exceptions.

1. Compliance with the two-adult rule includes the following:

- A. There must always be at least two adults present when supervising one or more students.
 - B. The adults must not be related family members. An unrelated adult is someone who is not the spouse, parent, sibling, or child of the other adult, or living in the same household as the other adult.
 - C. The unrelated adults must be at least four years older than the students being taught.
 - D. The adults should be in sight of each other at all times.
2. Exceptions:
- A. Sunday School for Fifth Grade through Senior High: One adult may teach Sunday school classes for students in fifth through twelfth grades. In the event that only one adult is teaching a Sunday school class for a lower grade, the Sunday school superintendent or the superintendent's designee shall act as a hall monitor and regularly observe the Sunday school classes.
 - B. One-on-One meetings: Some ministries use one-on-one meetings to provide mentoring (see below), recite memory work, and occasionally address disciplinary issues. These meetings shall ordinarily occur in public places that are visible to other adults. When these meetings occur in enclosed offices or classrooms, the windows shall be unobstructed and the doors shall remain open.
 - C. Unplanned Situations: Occasionally, employees, staff, and volunteers will find themselves without another adult present because of unforeseen circumstances. The following procedures should be followed:
 - i. Immediately inform the appropriate ministry leader or the leader's designee (e.g., by cell phone or text message) about the situation including where they are and who is present, seeking guidance.
 - ii. Attempt to arrange for another adult, or three or more children, to be present.
 - iii. Move to a visible location.

Facilities

All rooms used for ministries involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults must have a clear glass window in the interior door. All windows must remain unobstructed (i.e. no window coverings or signs on the windows).

Children and youth in the third grade through twelfth grades may use the restrooms without an adult escort. Children in the second grade or lower should be escorted to the restroom by at least one adult. The adult should remain in the hallway.

Children who are potty training shall use the restroom in the nursery, or adjacent to the nursery. One adult female will assist the child in the bathroom. The bathroom door is to remain open at all times and another adult will stand in the doorway, watching both the adult and child using the bathroom.

Other Adults/Persons

Employees, staff, and volunteers should ensure that anyone who has not been screened and approved for contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults does not have unsupervised access to students. This does not apply to parents with their own children, or grandparents with their own grandchildren.

Pick up / Drop off

Parents are responsible for supervising their children and youth until the time an activity is scheduled to begin and after the activity's scheduled ending time. When children or youth arrive at any church-ministry program, they are expected to remain in that program until the program ends. Children and youth may not leave programs early without parental permission communicated to the employee, staff, or volunteer responsible for the program.

Training

All staff and volunteers who participate in programs involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall receive training on Grace Fellowship's safe-church policy and procedures. Ordinarily, staff and volunteers shall complete this training before beginning to supervise children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Training should be completed annually. The Safe Church Team is responsible for maintaining records of training.

Physical Contact

Respect, safety, and appropriate boundaries are the guiding principles for physical contact between employees, staff, and volunteers, and minors and youth. The guidelines below are intended to avoid contact that is or may appear threatening or inappropriate. All should avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

Physical contact should be in response to the need of the child or youth, not the need of the adult. It should only occur with the permission of the child or youth. Resistance to physical contact must be respected. Physical contact is age and developmentally dependent; what is appropriate changes over time.

Positive and appropriate forms of physical contact include:

- Side hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes, high-fives, hand slapping, and fist bumps
- Holding hands during group prayer

Inappropriate forms of physical contact include:

- Full frontal or prolonged hugs
- Kisses
- Sitting on laps beyond age 5 (male employees, staff, and volunteers should not allow children to sit on their laps in the course of their duties)
- Showing affection in isolated areas (closets, bathrooms, one-on-one meetings)
- Wrestling
- Tickling
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a minor or youth or by a minor or youth to an adult
- Snapping bras or wedgies or similar touch of underwear
- Touching that involves contact with the breast, buttocks, or groin
- Spanking or any form of corporal punishment
- Any form of unwanted touch

Other forms of inappropriate conduct include:

- Comments or compliments on a child's or youth's physique or body developments
- Giving gifts or money to individual children or youth
- Private meals or meetings with individual children or youth outside of mentoring relationships
- Providing any medication to children or youth without permission from a parent or guardian
- Private communication with children or youth unrelated to ministry activities including by phone, text, social media, or other means except when approved by ministry leaders
- Inordinate communication with children or youth including by phone, text, social media, or other means
- Promising children or youth that information by them will be kept confidential from parents and church leaders
- Employees, staff, and volunteers may not, under any circumstances, date a student

Mentoring

Grace recognizes that mentoring is an appropriate and necessary aspect of discipleship. In Grace's programs and ministries, Grace encourages the development of appropriate mentoring relationships between approved adults and children and youth. The following guidelines should be observed with regard to all such mentoring relationships between adults and children or youth occurring within the context of Grace ministries:

- Adults intending to mentor individual children or youth as part of a Grace ministry shall identify the relationships to ministry leaders for approval.
- Mentoring meetings should take place in visible areas in a public place. Examples include the sitting areas in the foyer when church activities are taking place, a restaurant, a coffee shop, a visible park area.
- Employees, staff, and volunteers should never meet one-on-one with a child or youth in a private home unless the child's or youth's parent or another approved adult, unrelated to the adult who is providing the mentoring, is in the home and can view the employee, staff, or volunteer and the child or youth at any time.
- Written parental approval is required for any one-on-one mentoring meeting with a child who is younger than 14.
- For youth who are 14 or older, at the beginning of each school year and when a child or youth enters a program mid-year, parents will be informed that an employee, staff member, or volunteer may meet with their youth one-on-one. Parents will be asked to consent to such meetings. Once consent is obtained, employees, staff, and volunteers need not obtain permission each time they meet one-on-one with a youth. If a youth's parent(s) do not consent, then parental permission is required for each meeting.
- Employees, staff, and volunteers should notify the ministry leader before each one-on-one meeting. The notification should include the date, time, location, who will be attending, and whether the adult will be driving the child or youth.
- Employees, staff, and volunteers should avoid electronic communication with students, such as by text and social media, and in rare cases where it occurs it should be shared with other employees, staff, and volunteers for accountability.

Off-Site Activities

All off-site activities should be done in open areas or rooms, not in private rooms or restricted areas.

At times, the nature of some off-site activities requires youth to be without direct adult supervision for some time. In these cases, youth should always be in at least pairs (never alone); they should be told how to reach an employee, staff, or volunteer responsible for supervising the activity; they should have a charged cell phone; and they should be given clear instructions about geographic and time boundaries.

All children or youth participating in off-campus activities without a parent or guardian present must provide emergency contact information.

Driving

Anyone driving unrelated children or youth for Grace-sponsored activities must be at least 21 years old and have a valid driver's license for at least the last 3 years. Drivers must provide a copy of their driver's license, proof of insurance, and vehicle information to the ministry leader. Drivers who drive on overnight trips must be at least 25 years old and may be required to provide additional information.

Employees, volunteers, and staff shall ordinarily not drive two or fewer children or youth. Employees, volunteers, and staff shall observe the two-adult rule for all trips expected to last more than 30 minutes.

Overnight Events

Children and youth may only participate in overnight events if parents/guardians provide written permission.

Whether on-campus or off, male and female students must sleep in separate rooms with adult leaders of the same gender, or separate sides of the same room with adult leaders between the two sides. Employees, staff, and volunteers shall prevent anyone from entering the sleeping quarters of the opposite gender.

Anyone participating in an overnight event is required to wear modest sleep attire.

Employees, staff, and volunteers shall conduct periodic inspections of rooms, offices, work areas, bathrooms, and closets.

Reporting

Employees, staff, and volunteers are to report such information even if they received the information in confidence.

Purpose & Modification

Modifications to these procedures must be communicated to the Session at least 60 days before they take effect.