

# Because We Care

A photograph showing the silhouettes of a family of four (two adults and two children) holding hands and standing on a beach, looking out at the ocean during a sunset or sunrise. The background is a warm, hazy orange and yellow sky.

## **Children & Youth Policy Manual**

Grove Bible Church

St. Johns, MI 48879

(Approved 8/30/09)



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\* This Policy Manual applies to all the children and youth ministries of Grove Bible Church except for Junior Convention which operates under its own policies, and other individuals or groups that use or rent Grove's facilities for non-church functions.

# INTRODUCTION

## A Word From the Pastor

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The very fact that any church has to make a book like this is a testament to the depths to which our sin natures have taken us. I say “our” because all of us are equally depraved in the eyes of God. But praise God, we as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ have been cleansed by His blood and set apart for good works through the power of His Holy Spirit. Therefore, this “policy” manual is profitable not only to protect our children’s innocence, but it is also profitable to protect the testimony of Christ’s bride, His church.

## Why Do We Need a Child Protection Program?

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### Biblical reasons

*People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "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. (Mark 10:13-16)*

*"Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5)*

These passages from the Gospels show us that Jesus valued children and told us to welcome them. When we follow Christ’s example and “welcome” children, we are in essence welcoming Jesus Himself.

However, Jesus highlighted not only the faith and openness of children, but also their vulnerability. He warned those who prey upon the vulnerability of children.

*But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. (Matthew 18:6)*

If our church hopes to effectively welcome children, we must also protect them from those who would harm them.

### Cultural reasons

Our culture presents a risk to the children of this church: child abusers who actively seek to harm children. There has been a dramatic increase in the

number of reported and prosecuted cases of child sexual abuse in recent years. Churches are vulnerable because they have many programs for children, are constantly looking for volunteers, have an environment of trust, and often allow easy access to children with few safeguards.

Our culture also presents a risk to the workers of this church: the risk of unfounded accusations played out with widespread media attention.

## **What Does Our Program Seek to Accomplish?**

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Simple measures can be taken to significantly reduce the possibility of sexual abuse occurring within a church. This program was designed specifically for that purpose: **TO REDUCE THE RISK OF ABUSE OR INJURY TO CHILDREN AND TEENS AND TO REDUCE THE RISK OF FALSE ACCUSATIONS OF ABUSE AT GROVE BIBLE CHURCH.**

This protection program was designed to accomplish the following objectives:

To protect our children and teens by

- Reporting suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities.
- Screening individuals who desire to minister to children and teens at Grove.
- Providing adequate supervision for ministries and activities at Grove.
- Educating Grove's children and youth ministry workers about prevention of abuse.

To protect our children and youth ministry workers from false allegations of abuse by

- Educating them about how to avoid situations that invite suspicion.
- Educating them concerning appropriate and inappropriate forms of contact.

To protect and strengthen our church and its ministry by

- Designing a program that protects our ministries, but does not hinder their effectiveness.
- Establishing appropriate procedures to respond to alleged, reported, or suspected incidents of abuse.

This program has been compiled based on the following resources:

*Because We Care Policy*, Grandview Baptist Church, Des Moines, IA which was based upon:

*AdventureZone Children's Ministry Handbook*. Woodside Bible Church, Troy, MI.

- Caring for Our Children*. Child protection policy of Campus Baptist Church, Ames, IA.
- Child Protection Policy*. Capitol City Baptist Church, Des Moines, IA.
- Child Protection Policy*. Grace Church, Des Moines, IA.
- Child Safety Policy Template*. Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT, 2004.
- Reducing the Risk II: Making Your Church Safe from Child Sexual Abuse*. James F. Cobble, Jr., Richard R. Hammar, and Steven W. Klipowicz. Matthews, NC: Christian Ministry Resources, 2003.
- Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church*. Richard R. Hammar, Steven W. Klipowicz, and James F. Cobble, Jr. Matthews, NC: Christian Ministry Resources, 1993.
- Safe Place: Guidelines for Creating an Abuse-Free Environment*. Marv Parker, ed. Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 2002.
- Selecting & Screening Church Workers*. James F. Cobble, Jr. and Richard R. Hammer. Matthews, NC: Christian Ministry Resources, 1996.
- Elementary Manual and Early Childhood Manual*, Trinity Church, Lansing, MI
- Playbook*, South Church, Lansing, MI

## **What Is Child Abuse/Neglect?**

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### **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is a non-accidental injury to a child. Physical abuse may include, but is not limited to, burning, beating, kicking and punching. There may be physical evidence of bruises, burns, broken bones or other unexplained injuries. Internal injuries may not be readily apparent.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse encompasses several different types of inappropriate sexual behavior:

- Any intentional touching/contact that can be reasonably construed as being for the purpose of sexual arousal, gratification, or any other improper purpose.
- Sexual penetration.
- Accosting, soliciting, or enticing a child to commit, or attempt to commit, an act of sexual contact or penetration, including prostitution.

### **Child Maltreatment**

Child maltreatment is defined as the treatment of a child that involves cruelty or suffering that a reasonable person would recognize as excessive. Possible examples of maltreatment are:

- A parent who utilizes locking the child in a closet as a means of punishment.
- A parent who forces their child to eat dog food out of a dog bowl during dinner as a method of punishment and/or humiliation.
- A parent who responds to their child's bed-wetting by subjecting the child to public humiliation by hanging a sign outside the house or making the child wear a sign to school, which lets others know that the child wets the bed.

## **Mental Injury**

A pattern of physical or verbal acts or omissions on the part of the parent and/or person responsible for the health and welfare of the child that results in psychological or emotional injury/impairment to a child **or** places a child at significant risk of being psychologically or emotionally injured/impaired (e.g., depression, anxiety, lack of attachment, psychosis, fear of abandonment or safety, fear that life or safety is threatened, etc.).

## **Neglect**

Child neglect encompasses several areas:

- Physical Neglect - Negligent treatment, including but not limited to failure to provide or attempt to provide, the child with food, clothing, or shelter necessary to sustain the life or health of the child, excluding those situations solely attributable to poverty.
- Failure to Protect - knowingly allowing another person to abuse and/or neglect the child without taking appropriate measures to stop the abuse and/or neglect or to prevent it from recurring when the person is able to do so and has, or should have had, knowledge of the abuse and/or neglect.
- Improper Supervision - placing the child in, or failing to remove the child from, a situation that a reasonable person would realize requires judgment or actions beyond the child's level of maturity, physical condition, or mental abilities and results in harm or threatened harm to the child.
- Abandonment - The person responsible for the child's health and welfare leaves a child with an agency, person, or other entity (e.g., DHS, hospital, mental health facility, etc.) without:
  - obtaining an agreement with that person/entity to assume responsibility for the child.
  - Cooperating with the department to provide for the care and custody of the child.
- Medical Neglect - Failure to seek, obtain, or follow through with medical care for the child, with the failure resulting in or presenting risk of death, disfigurement or bodily harm or with the failure resulting in an observable and material impairment to the growth, development, or functioning of the child.

## **Indicators of Child Abuse/Neglect**

Determining when to report situations of suspected child abuse/neglect can be difficult. When in doubt, contact the local DHS office for consultation. Below are some of the commonly accepted physical and behavioral warning signs associated with various forms of child abuse and neglect. **Note that the physical and behavioral indicators below, in themselves, are not the only indicators of child abuse and neglect and, if present, do not always mean a child is being abused or neglected.**

	<b>Physical Indicators</b>	<b>Behavior Indicators</b>
<b>Physical Abuse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bruises more numerous than expected from explanation of incident.</li> <li>• Unexpected bruises, welts, or loop marks in various stages of healing.</li> <li>• Adult/human bite marks.</li> <li>• Bald spots or missing clumps of hair.</li> <li>• Unexplained fractures, skin lacerations, punctures, or abrasions.</li> <li>• Swollen lips and/or chipped teeth.</li> <li>• Linear/parallel marks on cheeks and/or temple area.</li> <li>• Crescent shaped bruising caused by pinching.</li> <li>• Puncture wounds that resemble distinctive objects.</li> <li>• Bruising behind the ears.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-destructive/self mutilation.</li> <li>• Withdrawn and/or aggressive-behavior extremes.</li> <li>• Uncomfortable/skittish with physical contact.</li> <li>• Arrives at school late.</li> <li>• Expresses fear of being at home.</li> <li>• Chronic runaway (adolescents).</li> <li>• Complaints of soreness or moves uncomfortably.</li> <li>• Wears clothing inappropriate to weather to cover body.</li> <li>• Lacks impulse control (e.g., inappropriate outbursts).</li> </ul>
<b>Physical Neglect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distended stomach, emaciated.</li> <li>• Unattended medical needs.</li> <li>• Lack of supervision.</li> <li>• Consistent signs of hunger, inappropriate dress, poor hygiene.</li> <li>• Sudden or unexplained weight change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly displays fatigue or listlessness; falls asleep in class.</li> <li>• Steals, hoards or begs for food.</li> <li>• Reports that no caretaker is at home</li> </ul>
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain or itching in genital area.</li> <li>• Bruises or bleeding in genital area.</li> <li>• Sexually transmitted disease.</li> <li>• Frequent urinary or yeast infections.</li> <li>• Sudden or unexplained weight change.</li> <li>• Pregnancy 12 years or under</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawal, chronic depression.</li> <li>• Sexual behaviors or references that are unusual for the child's age.</li> <li>• Seductive or promiscuous behavior.</li> <li>• Poor self-esteem, self devaluation, lack of confidence.</li> <li>• Suicide attempts</li> </ul>

**Grove Bible Church forbids sexual abuse, misconduct, harassment, coercion, or exploitation of children, teens, or adults in any ministry of Grove Bible Church. Those who engage in such behavior will be subject to a disciplinary process which will include all necessary legal actions.**



# SELECTION OF WORKERS

The following policies and guidelines will be followed as Grove Bible Church reviews applicants for positions of service in our children and youth ministries.

## Selection Procedures

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1. Threshold requirement

*Volunteers must be born-again regular attendees of Grove Bible Church (at least six months) and have completed the sixth grade (those under the age of 18 may be a “third” person). Exceptions may be made by the Children’s Ministry Committee (CMC).*

2. Orientation

*Volunteers will meet with at least one member of the CMC.*

This meeting will include instruction for the volunteer on the prevention and awareness of child abuse. (A training seminar and/or video/DVD may be used in lieu of the personal meeting for all workers currently serving during the implementation of this program).

3. Children and Youth Ministries Volunteer Form

*Volunteers must complete and sign a Children and Youth Ministries Volunteer Form and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information every three years.*

This form is confidential and will be kept in a secured location.

4. Background & reference checks

*Background checks, including criminal reference checks, may be made of volunteers 18 years old or older. Consent for background criminal checks is included on each Volunteer Form. These forms are confidential and will be kept in a secured location.*

*Each volunteer must submit at least two reference letters (forms are attached to the application). These references can include Grove Bible Church members, but not relatives or members of the CMC.*

# SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN

The following policies and guidelines must be carefully followed in our church to ensure the safety of the children and to protect the workers from false accusations:

## Accountability and Visibility

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*All church ministries and activities involving children and teens are to be conducted in ways that promote accountability and visibility, not secrecy and isolation.* In order to help maintain this standard, the following guidelines must be followed:

### Accountability (someone else knows what is happening)

All ministries involving children or youth are to be staffed on a team basis. At least two adult approved workers should be present during church ministries and activities (an additional worker is required for Junior Church).

### Visibility (someone else sees what is happening)

All ministries involving children or youth are to be conducted in a way that ensures visibility. Classrooms are equipped with windows for visual protection. Church staff, ministry supervisors, and the parents of children or youth in any church ministry have the right to observe the program at any time unannounced (this does not include the right to disrupt or interfere with the ministry).

The rule of thumb is: **A lone child or youth should not be isolated with a lone worker** (isolation occurs when no one else is aware of the situation and when there is no opportunity for others to observe activity).

### Special circumstances

#### ***Diapers:***

Diapers should be changed in designated areas and in the presence of others. Only women are to change diapers (of others' children).

#### ***Restroom assistance (Ministries in the Main Building):***

Pre-School children: The restroom door (and stall doors if child needs assistance) must remain open whenever a child and worker are inside.

Elementary aged children: A worker should never take a child alone **into** the restroom. The worker should knock on the door and then enter the restroom to make sure it is empty. Then the child enters the restroom by himself or herself. The worker should enter the restroom only when absolutely necessary to assist a child, keeping the door open. If a child is having

difficulty with their clothing, assist only in the presence of another adult or in a visible area.

Junior Church: The restrooms on the lower level are only for children during Junior Church. Two women are to escort children to the restrooms.

***Extra events:***

All non-regularly scheduled events (outside of the regular Sunday/Wednesday services) involving ministry workers and children/youth of Grove must be pre-approved by the respective committee (CMC or Youth Committee or in the absence of such a committee, the deacons) before announcing the event to the children/youth. They should be planned in a way that promotes accountability and visibility, not secrecy and isolation.

Information regarding activities, personnel, and logistics should be clearly communicated to the committee and then to the parents. Once the details of the event have been approved by both the committee and presented to the parents, the details may not be changed without approval of the pastor or a member of the committee in the pastor's absence.

Parental permission slips are required for each extra event. Rules and expectations for behavior must be clearly communicated to all participants before the activity.

Special attention should be given to any overnight lodging situations. The genders should not be mixed and two workers of the same gender as the children and/or teens must be present at all times.

***Transportation:***

In cases where a worker may be riding alone in a vehicle with a child or teen in a ministry capacity as an approved driver (see transportation policy), make sure the parents and/or pastor/ministry leader know the travel plans. Workers should never ride alone in a vehicle with a child or teen of the opposite gender.

## **Proper and Improper Physical Contact**

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*Workers should be free to use appropriate forms of physical affection with young children, but children and teens should be protected from inappropriate forms of physical contact.* In order to help maintain this standard, the following guidelines should be followed:

### **Touching policy**

Some forms of physical affection are generally appropriate for young children (holding a baby, hugging a toddler, having a toddler sit on a worker's lap, etc.) and important for a child's development. However,

physical affection should always be in the presence of another worker. This behavior must never give the appearance of wrongdoing.

Workers should avoid all inappropriate forms of physical contact with older children and teens. Church workers should also do their best to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.

### Discipline procedures

Proper discipline may be necessary to ensure safety and promote learning. However, no form of corporal punishment should ever be used. (Corporal punishment is any punishment intended to cause physical pain.) Proper discipline includes:

1. Rewarding good behavior with verbal praise.
2. Reminding children/teens of proper classroom behavior.
3. Redirecting children/teens by separating those who are misbehaving.
4. Removing a child from the group using a time-out chair within the classroom.
5. Restraining a child/teen from harming himself/herself and/or others when necessary.
6. Returning a child/teen to a parent if steps 1 through 5 fail to change behavior.

### General Conduct

Ministry leaders who observe unacceptable behavior at any time on the church property by anyone (child or adult), should lovingly and respectfully confront them.

## **Proper Identification and Dismissal**

*Supervision will be maintained before and after events until children are in the custody of their respective parents or legal guardians or another person appointed by the parents.* In order to help maintain this standard, the following guidelines should be followed:

### Nursery identification

The Nursery will maintain a process for clearly identifying each child. Children will only be released to a properly identified adult or older sibling (ages 12 or older).

### Dismissal procedures

Children second grade and under will not be dismissed from any class, activity, or function until picked up by a parent, older sibling (ages 12 or older), or another person appointed by the parent(s).

## **Reporting of Accidents and Incidents**

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*Workers should report to the senior pastor serious injuries and inappropriate behavior occurring at a Grove Bible Church sponsored event.*

## **Policy deviations by church workers**

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In a spirit of Christian love, the witness should speak with the ministry worker concerning the observed policy deviation.

The witness to the act should report the deviation to the ministry leader within 24 hours.

# SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE OR MISCONDUCT

## Recognizing Symptoms of Abuse or Molestation

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Church workers and staff should be alert to the physical signs of abuse and molestation, as well as to behavioral and verbal signs that a victim may exhibit. Some of the more common signs are summarized below:

PHYSICAL SIGNS may include:

- Lacerations and bruises
- Nightmares
- Irritation, pain or injury to the genital area
- Difficulty with urination
- Discomfort when sitting
- Torn or bloody underclothing
- Venereal disease

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS may include:

- Anxiety when approaching church, nursery or home
- Nervous or hostile behavior toward adults
- “Acting out” sexual behavior
- Withdrawal from church activities and friends

VERBAL SIGNS may include the following statements:

- I don’t like {a particular church worker or other adult}.
- {He/she} does things to me when we’re alone.
- I don’t like to be alone with {him/her}.
- {He/she} fooled around with me.

## Reporting Abuse or Misconduct

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Michigan law defines a mandatory reporter to be: a “physician, dentist, physician’s assistant, registered dental hygienist, medical examiner, nurse, person licensed to provide emergency medical care, audiologist, psychologist, marriage and family therapist, licensed professional counselor, social worker, licensed master’s social worker, licensed bachelor’s social worker, registered social service technician, social service technician, school administrator, school counselor or teacher, law

enforcement officer, professional staff of Friend of the Court, member of the clergy, or regulated child care provider.”

Even if you are not a mandatory reporter, the state law permits any person to report suspected abuse or neglect.

*Acts or suspected acts of abuse or neglect, misconduct, or policy deviations must be brought to the attention of the senior pastor.* No investigative or corrective measures can be initiated until a problem is appropriately reported. The following requirements for reporting violations must be observed by all workers.

#### Suspensions of parental abuse or molestation

The worker observing suspected signs of abuse, neglect or molestation is to privately report such suspicions to the senior pastor immediately.

#### Acts of misconduct by church workers

If a witness sees an overt act of abuse, the witness to the act is to intervene immediately so the action is not allowed to continue. If a witness sees a suspicious or questionable act, the witness should speak in a spirit of Christian love to the ministry worker concerning the observed behavior.

The witness to the act is to immediately report the incident to the senior pastor.

<p>The most important principle to remember is: <b>Report Incidents Immediately!</b></p>
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## **Rapid Response P.L.A.N. for Allegations of Abuse or Misconduct**

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It will be the policy of Grove Bible Church to take all allegations of misconduct by staff and workers involving children and teens seriously. All complaints of misconduct will be handled according to the following procedures.

#### P: Prevent interaction

*As soon as someone witnesses abuse or evidence of abuse by one of our church workers, the ministry leader and/or pastoral staff member will use whatever action is deemed appropriate to prevent any more interaction between children and the accused worker.* This is to protect the child from further injury and the adult from added accusations.

L: Listen to the person making the report

*The senior pastor will listen to a preliminary report from those who reported the incident. The person who observed the activity in question will summarize the incident concentrating on a factual description of what was observed.*

A: Assemble the response team

*A Response Team may be assembled immediately to address the allegation.*

The Response Team may include the following: the Senior Pastor, other pastoral staff members, appropriate ministry leaders, the church attorney, and/or others deemed necessary by the Senior Pastor.

**All public communication is to be conducted by the Senior Pastor or by another spokesman designated by him.**

The Response Team will determine an appropriate response to the incident, which may include any of the following: exoneration and restoration, policy refresher, reprimand, permanent dismissal from ministry to children, teens, or all church ministries, church discipline.

The Response Team will take great care to protect the confidentiality of the alleged victim and the accused worker. It is possible, or even likely, that several people will be aware of the incident. Each person should be cautioned to avoid gossip.

N: Notify the proper authorities

*Anytime that the senior pastor believes there is reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect, he is legally obligated to report it to the proper authorities. If a worker suspects abuse or neglect, they must immediately report it to the senior pastor who may notify the proper authorities. If the pastor is not immediately available, report to the chairman of the deacons or another deacon if he is not available.*