



MyChurch Children's Ministry Policies

This sample form contains color-coded prompts and instructional comments within the body of the document. Because there is no 'one size fits all' policy form, the authors have attempted to provide guidance on as many matters as possible. It is expected that ministry leaders **will modify these policy documents** to fit the programs, positions, facilities and other factors that makes each student ministry unique.

Red type is instructional and should be removed from a final draft of your policy document.

Yellow highlights relate to positions or titles assigned to a person or persons with supervisory responsibility (i.e. Youth Pastor or Executive Pastor). Modify this document such that the correct position or title for YOUR ministry is associated with the responsibility described. Remove the highlights in your final policy document.

Blue highlights relate to specific state reporting requirements. The reporting requirement for the state of Texas is listed in this form. Remove the highlights in your final policy document.

Green type relates to state reporting requirements and policy language options depending on specific state law requirements

Dear Children's Volunteer or Staff Member,

Welcome to My Church!

At My Church, we take our responsibility to care for children very seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which children can grow in relationship with Jesus Christ.

The pages of this handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guidelines for Our Church volunteers and staff members. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for children, protecting children, you, and the mission of My Church. The following procedures have been adopted and will be strictly enforced.

After you have carefully read this policy manual, please sign and return the agreement form located on the last page.

Sincerely,

My Church Staff

My Church Policies & Procedures for Children's Ministries

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Overview of the My Church Safety System

Because we love children and desire to protect them, My Church requires all staff members and volunteers working with children or students (and other vulnerable populations) to complete **4 SAFETY STEPS** before ministry work or volunteer placements begin.

STEP ONE: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

My Church policies and procedures require that staff members and volunteers avoid abusive behavior of any kind. Staff members and volunteers are required to report any policy violations to a supervisor or a member of the My Church Safety Committee. Staff members and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in ‘grooming’ a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, win the child’s trust (and the trust of the child’s parent or ‘gatekeeper’), manipulate the child into sexual activity and keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

To equip My Church staff members and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, My Church requires all staff members and volunteers to complete MinistrySafe sexual abuse awareness training (live or online at www.MinistrySafe.com). This training will be renewed every two years.

STEP TWO: Screening Process

Staff members and volunteers are required to complete the My Church Screening Process, which requires a staff member or volunteer to:

- complete an Employment Application (employees only)
 - complete the Safety Application (employees and volunteers)
 - complete a face-to-face interview (employees and volunteers)
 - provide references to be checked (employees and volunteers)
- *a volunteer must attend My Church for six months before being eligible to serve in positions providing access to children, students or vulnerable populations.

STEP THREE: Policies & Procedures

Staff members and volunteers are required to review the policies contained in this manual and sign the last page indicating that he or she has read and understood the material, and agrees to comply with policy requirements.

STEP FOUR: Criminal Background Check

My Church requires that all staff members and volunteers working or volunteering in children’s or student activities or programming undergo a criminal background check. Depending upon position, differing levels or intensity of background check may be required.

****This policy segment is intended to clearly identify for an inappropriate applicant the hurdles which exist to gaining access to children or students at ‘My Church’. In addition, the segment describes measures in place to equip other staff members and volunteers to recognize abuser characteristics and behaviors, as***

well as reporting requirements. These policy segments provide an 'opt out opportunity' for would-be molesters.

Child Safety Policy

ABUSE TOLERANCE

My Church has a **zero tolerance for abuse** in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff and volunteer at My Church to act in the best interest of all children in every program.

In the event that staff or volunteers observe any inappropriate behaviors (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is their responsibility to immediately report their observations to their **immediate supervisor**, the **Children's Pastor** or the **Executive Pastor**.

Designations may vary depending on the size, structure or reporting relationships within a church. This segment should identify the position or title of the individual to whom staff members of volunteers are to report.

REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

My Church is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to the My Church Safety Committee Chair and the Police Department, Child Protective Services, or other appropriate agency.

An element of the safe environment referenced above includes the fostering of a culture of reporting relevant information to a supervisor or a member of the My Church Safety Committee. Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to 'groom' a child for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are asked to report 'grooming' behavior, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to a supervisor or a member of the My Church Safety Committee.

ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES

My Church staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff members or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all My Church policies. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment from Children's Ministry's positions for both volunteers and staff members. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the **Executive Pastor** and the **Board of Elders**.

These positions or titles may vary depending on the structure or reporting relationships within a church body.

Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse

REPORTING VIOLATION OF POLICY

In order to maintain a safe environment for our children, My Church staff members and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies. All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to an immediate supervisor in the ministry area, the **Children's Pastor**, or the **Executive Pastor**.

These positions or titles may vary depending on the structure or reporting relationships within the church body.

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child will be immediately suspended from participation in Children's Ministries. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or Child Protective agencies.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act should be prohibited from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming that involves children, students or vulnerable populations at My Church. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment from My Church.

Failure to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for termination of employment of a staff member or employee. Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children, students or vulnerable populations at My Church.

REPORTING SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Staff members and volunteers at My Church are required to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect, or any inappropriate behavior of a colleague or co-worker, to the immediate supervisor of the area, the **Children's Pastor**, or the **Executive Pastor**.

These positions or titles may vary depending on the structure of reporting relationships within the church body.

(Relevant state) law requires that any person having cause to believe a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect must make a report to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

Optional Policy Language depending on state law or desired practice:

State laws vary concerning mandatory reporters and mandatory reporting requirements. Teachers, nurses and day care employees, for example, are usually listed as mandatory reporters. Further, state laws are changing reporting requirements – usually expanding the list of mandatory reporters and shortening the 'reasonable' time periods for a report. In 2013, the state of Texas modified Chapter 261.101(b) of the Texas Family Code (reporting statute) such that 'professionals' (teachers, nurses, doctors, day care employees, more) must personally make a report to the appropriate authorities ... "a professional may not delegate to or rely on another person to make the report".

The reporting process should be clearly outlined in the policy AND comply with relevant state law. Administrators should periodically check state reporting requirements for modification of reporting requirements.

Option 1.

A staff member or volunteer *may* report to an immediate supervisor, Children’s Pastor or Executive Pastor, and allow supervisory personnel to make the appropriate report to law enforcement agencies. [does not comply with Texas Family Code 261.101(b) for ‘professionals’] In no way does any provision in this policy discourage any staff member or volunteer from reporting a suspicion of abuse or neglect to the appropriate [state] authorities.

Option 2.

A staff member or volunteer must report to the appropriate [state] authorities. After having done so, the staff member or volunteer must notify an immediate supervisor, Children’s Pastor or Executive Pastor. In no way does any provision in this policy discourage any staff member or volunteer from reporting a suspicion of abuse or neglect to the appropriate [state] authorities.

Option 3.

A staff member or volunteer will immediately notify an immediate supervisor, Children’s Pastor or Executive Pastor. Together with the immediate supervisor, Children’s or Executive Pastor, the staff member or volunteer will make a report to the appropriate [state] authorities. In no way does any provision in this policy discourage any staff member or volunteer from reporting a suspicion of abuse or neglect to the appropriate [state] authorities.

Staff members and volunteers are required to verbally report an incident to supervisory staff as soon as possible after the incident. After receiving a report from a staff member or volunteer in Children’s Ministries, the **Children’s Pastor** or **Executive Pastor** will speak with the person or volunteer to whom the child spoke in order to get detailed information about the entire conversation. The **Executive Pastor** will be notified as soon as reasonably possible.

If appropriate, the **Children’s Pastor** or the **Executive Pastor** will inform the **Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (1-800-252-5400)**, or **Child Protective Services (817-321-8680)**.

These positions and titles may vary depending on the structure or reporting relationships within the church body. State reporting requirements vary state by state, with most including the language above. Research your state’s law for specific reporting requirements for your church.

RESPONSE TO REPORT OF ABUSE

The My Church Safety Committee will take appropriate action on behalf of the church when a report of abuse occurs.

My Church Safety Committee

SAFETY COMMITTEE

Recognizing the importance of providing and maintaining a safe environment for children, My Church will appoint and maintain a Safety Committee, which will meet once each quarter.

MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the Safety Committee is to enable My Church Children's Ministries to carry out appropriate ministry activities while safeguarding program participants against emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

COMPOSITION

The Safety Committee will be comprised of the following members:

1. the Executive Pastor
2. the Children's Pastor
3. the Student Ministries Pastor

**These positions or titles may vary depending on the structure or reporting relationships within a church body.*

MEETINGS

_____ will chair the meeting of the Safety Committee on a quarterly basis to discuss risk management practices and updates. The Safety Committee will also meet on an emergency basis upon the recommendation of a member or following the report of any incident or allegation.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Safety Committee will be charged with the following duties:

1. Applying existing My Church policies and procedures related to children's safety and risk management issues.
2. Monitoring all Children's Ministries programs for ongoing compliance with safety policies.
3. Making recommendations to the My Church Board of Elders regarding safety issues.

Children's Ministries Staff Monitoring Plan

Monitoring of staff and volunteers will include regular (announced and unannounced) visits in each program to provide supervisors the opportunity to observe staff members and volunteer interactions with children.

1. **Each supervisor** conducts an unscheduled observation at least once each week for programs that occur weekly.
2. **The Children's Pastor** conducts **written** performance evaluations **every six months** for individuals in paid staff positions.
3. **The Children's Pastor** conducts **periodic** verbal performance evaluations that include items that address participation in risk management training and adherence to risk management procedures.
4. **The Executive Pastor** conducts an unscheduled observation of a Children's Ministry program at least once each quarter.
5. **The Executive Pastor** meets with the **Children's Pastor** once monthly to discuss Children's Ministry.
6. **The Elder Board** meets with the **Children's Pastor** once each year to discuss Children's Ministry, **including safety training and procedures.**
7. **The Children's Pastor** conducts an unscheduled observation at least once each month for programs occurring weekly.

BUILDING SAFETY

The **Children's Pastor** will be responsible for ensuring that the **Children's Building** is monitored during Sunday classes or programming. This will include unobserved monitoring of staff members, volunteers and children in children's classrooms.

No child will ever be left unattended in the Children's Building or on the children's playground during children's ministry programming or classes. Children's Ministries staff members or volunteers are prohibited from being alone with an individual child in any room or building. In the event a staff member or volunteer finds himself/herself alone with a single child, that staff member or volunteer will take the child to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: if a child is the last in a class to be picked up by a parent, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present.)

After every programming event, Children's Ministries staff members and volunteers must ensure every room and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

On the children's playground, staff members and volunteers are to circulate, watching children during play periods, giving particular attention to the areas which are not easily seen from all viewpoints. (Example: under slides, in corners, behind structures).

Any two children together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area of the playground.

WORKER TO CHILD RATIOS

My Church is committed to providing adequate supervision in all Children's Ministries programs. Accordingly, the following worker to child ratios will be observed:

Program	Workers	Children
Nursery	2	8
Preschool, 2 and 3 years old	2	12
Preschool, 4 and 5 years old	2	18
Elementary	2	20
Kids Kamp	2	20

**The above ratios are MinistrySafe minimum recommendations. Where supervision is concerned, more is generally better.*

If a worker is 'out of ratio' it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify the program supervisor or the **Children's Pastor**. Supervisors will make diligent efforts to find substitute workers to immediately bring worker to children ratios into compliance with Church policy.

DISCIPLINE

It is My Church's policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children. **No form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. Children are to be disciplined using time-outs and other non-physical methods of behavior management. In employing this procedure, staff members and volunteers should observe the following guidelines:

- 1) Verbally redirect the child before physically intervening. With younger children some physical redirection may be necessary (for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child that is hitting another).
- 2) If the behavior does not cease, remove or direct the child away from the group to a corner of the room where the group is meeting (avoid being alone with the child).
- 3) Provide the child with a simple, understandable reason for the time-out, and provide the child with clear explanation of your expectations. ("Jamie, you didn't stop hitting Chris when I asked you to, so you need to sit quietly in the blue chair for three minutes.") In addition, be verbally reassuring, as being removed from the group will likely upset the child. Do not physically hold the child in time-out.
- 4) Provide the child with a chair to sit in or a "spot" to sit on (using a pillow, blanket, carpet square, etc.) until their time-out is complete.
- 5) Follow the rule of thumb that a time-out is ineffective if it lasts longer than one minute for every year of the child's life (3 years old, 3 minutes).
- 6) Monitor the child through the entire time-out without giving your undivided attention. For longer time-outs give intermittent praise to reassure the child and keep them on task. ("Jamie, you're doing a great job of sitting quietly – just 2 more minutes.")
- 7) Praise the child once he or she has completed the time-out and tell them that their reward is being able to rejoin the group. Remind them that repeating their initial behavior will result in further time-out. Follow this with praise.

Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and the **Children's Pastor**.

BATHROOM SUPERVISION AND ASSISTANCE GUIDELINE

Nursery children

Because nursery children may require complete assistance with their bathroom activities, all staff members and volunteers will observe the following policies:

Diapering

- 1) Only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will undertake the diapering of children of either sex.
- 2) Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of other nursery workers.
- 3) Children will never be left unattended on changing tables.
- 4) Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in nursery will be recorded on the registration cards ("Seth Adams has a medicine in the bag for rash.")
- 5) Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.
- 6) Children should be changed on changing stations only.

Toilet training

- 1) No child will be forced to toilet train.
- 2) Only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will participate in toilet training efforts with children of either sex.
- 3) When children are taken into bathrooms the door will be left partially open.
- 4) Young children will never be left unattended in bathrooms.
- 5) Parents should be consulted on each child's progress in the toilet training process before leaving the child with volunteers or staff members. Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in the nursery will be recorded on the registration card ("Georgia can use the toilet, but she needs to be reminded – ask her if she needs to go").
- 6) Children should be assisted in straightening their clothing before returning to the room with other children.
- 7) "Accidents" should be handled by reassuring the child and completing the changing of diapers or underwear and clothing. Extra clothing and diapers are available from My Church in the children's area, if the parent has not furnished a clothing change.

School age children

School age children may be accompanied to the restroom for supervision and assistance when needed. (However, children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities.) Staff members and volunteers should never take a lone child to the restroom.

If a staff member or volunteer must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, he or she should seek out another worker to accompany him/her. If another worker is not available to accompany, he/she should go to the exterior bathroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance. If the child requires assistance, the worker should leave the exterior bathroom door open when entering the bathroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing their activities, while the child remains behind the door of the bathroom stall.

Any assistance with the straightening or fastening of garments should be done in the presence of another staff member or volunteer.

Special needs

Parents will offer instruction to staff members or volunteers to change the diapers of special needs individuals. After the age of 4, parents or legal guardians will change all special needs individuals.

INTOXICANTS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any My Church facility, while traveling with children, or while working with or supervising children.

MEDICATION

Medication may be given to a child by a staff member or volunteer with a doctor's prescription. The medication must be in the original packaging, including over the counter medication. The only exceptions to this policy are diaper ointment/medication and insect bite cream, after a parent information sheet is signed by a parent or guardian.

NUDITY

Staff members and volunteers in My Church's Children's Ministries should never be nude in the presence of children in their care. In the event there is a situation that may call for or contemplate the possibility of nudity (i.e. changing clothes during a pool party, weekend or overnight retreat, etc.), staff member/volunteer will submit a plan to the Children's Pastor concerning arrangements for showering or changing clothes.

ONE-TO-ONE INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Staff members and volunteers should never conduct one-to-one, unobserved meetings or interaction with children while participating in My Church Children's Ministry program. Another adult who has completed the My Church application and screening process should always be present.

TRANSPORTATION

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for children. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when workers are involved in the transportation of children:

1. Children should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided. Staff members and volunteers should avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one child in transport.
2. Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with children while in vehicles.
3. No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving My Church vans, or vehicles owned or rented by My Church, unless in an emergency.
4. No drivers under age 25 may drive My Church owned or rented vehicles.

PARENTAL CONTACT

Parents who leave a child in the care of My Church staff members and volunteers during church services or activities will be contacted if their child becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in Children's Ministries programs.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents are encouraged to visit any and all services and programs in which their child is involved at My Church. Parents have an open invitation to observe all programs and activities in which their child is involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with their children's programs at My Church will be required to complete the My Church volunteer application and screening process.

PHYSICAL CONTACT

My Church is committed to protecting children in its care. To this end, My Church has implemented a 'physical contact policy' which promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our Children's Ministries while protecting children. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in Children's Ministries programs:

1. Hugging, pats on the back and other forms of appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and children are important for children's development, and are generally suitable in the church setting.
2. Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching or displays of affection should be immediately reported to an immediate supervisor, the **Children's Pastor** or the **Executive Pastor**.
3. Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child, and never be based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.
4. Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other children or children's staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.
5. Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff members or volunteers in Children's Ministries must foster trust at all times. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
6. Do not force physical contact, touch or affection on a reluctant child. A child's preference not to be touched must be respected.
7. Children's staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.
8. Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse by a staff member or volunteer must be reported immediately to an immediate supervisor, the **Children's Pastor** or the **Executive Pastor**.

SEXUALLY ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with children, and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any child in the program.

SEXUALLY ORIENTED MATERIALS

Staff members and volunteers in Children's Ministries at My Church are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children.

TOBACCO USE

My Church requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of children or their parents, or during My Church activities or programs. My Church is a tobacco-free facility.

VERBAL INTERACTIONS

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and children should be positive and uplifting. My Church staff members and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of children.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to children in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff members and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children.

RELEASE OF CHILDREN

At any time that a child has been entrusted to My Church staff members or volunteers, the Church incurs responsibility for the safety and well-being of the child. Staff members and volunteers must act to ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge.

Children's Ministries staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing children in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities.

It is presumed a person who drops off a child or student has authority to pick up the child.

In the event that staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact their immediate supervisor or the **Children's Pastor** before releasing the child.

****If a system is used matching children to parents, insert a description of that system here.***

SUPERVISION

Staff members and volunteers in Children's Ministries are expected to provide adequate supervision for children in their care while working in church programs.

Policies and Procedures
Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement

I have received and read a copy of My Church's Children's Ministries Policies and Procedures and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving or working at My Church.

I understand the manual may be modified, and that any guideline may be amended, revised, or eliminated by My Church.

I have reviewed the duties listed in my ministry position description, and I agree to fulfill these duties. I understand I may choose to end my employment or voluntary service at My Church at any time (If possible, I will provide two weeks' notice to my supervisor).

I acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this handbook in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between me and My Church. If applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no monetary compensation for hours worked.

I understand it is my responsibility to review new guidelines which may be created and distributed.

I acknowledge receipt of My Church policies and procedures manual.

Staff Member or Volunteer's name (please print)

Staff Member or Volunteer's signature

Date: _____

[This page to remain attached to the My Church Policies and Procedures.]

Policies and Procedures
Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement

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I acknowledge receipt of My Church policies and procedures manual.

Staff Member or Volunteer's name (please print)

Staff Member or Volunteer's signature

Date: _____

[This page to be detached and included in the employment/volunteer file.]