

Child Safety Protocols - Policy Statement - Family Version



Policy Statement

Grace Communion International has a deep concern for the wholeness and wellbeing of each individual. Our church seeks to safeguard the welfare of all people, regardless of age, who come into contact with the church and its ministries. It is the responsibility of each individual within the fellowship of the church to ensure the physical, spiritual, emotional, and sexual safety of our children and young people.

The church must be beyond reproach in this matter. To say this is to make a statement about the safety of the physical environment we conduct activities in, and the level of competent, caring supervision that we guarantee to our families, children and young people.

In approving this policy and guidelines, the Grace Communion International requires those working with children and young people to be more aware than ever before of procedures of good practice in securing the safety of children and young people. The policy, procedures and practices of the church in relation to the provision of a safe environment for children and young people are based on three criteria:

1. the need to protect children and young people in our care;
2. the need to protect leaders and teachers (e.g. from undue temptation or from behaving in ways which may be well-intentioned but inadvisable, or from false allegations); and,
3. the need to protect the church, especially as an institution, from litigation.

Goal

The goal of the child safety protocols is, as far as possible, to ensure that congregations provide a safe place for children and young people to grow and develop and ensure that if harm occurs it is dealt with appropriately. The protocols are an endeavour to minimise, or remove anything that could represent a threat to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of children and young people.

The care of all of our children and young people is served when we:

- become better informed about the safety and the care of children and young people;
- work towards reducing the factors which contribute to the harm of children;
- listen to children and support them;
- treat children with the dignity and respect they deserve;
- take actions on suspicions we may have about children who may be at risk, or the inappropriate actions of others towards them; and,
- introduce standard principles and procedures to protect children from harm, and to protect innocent adults from wrongful accusation.

Duty of Care

Keeping children physically safe is not the sole responsibility of parents. As a caring, nurturing church, all community members must take responsibility for the care and safety of children – we implicitly promise this at the blessing of a child.

Children and young people must be cared for and ministered to in an environment that is free from danger or harm. The physical, spiritual and emotional environment must be such that at all times children and young people are affirmed and nurtured in a place where they are safe.

Harm - *Any detrimental effect of a significant nature on a Child's wellbeing. It is immaterial how the harm is caused. (Child Protection Act 1999) Harm may be caused by physical, emotional, spiritual, sexual or systems abuse, exploitation or neglect.*

Property

In the care of children, a duty of care includes the provision of adequate supervision, and safe premises, grounds and equipment. When a child is engaged in an activity of the congregation that is designed for children, it is the responsibility of the team leaders and volunteers to ensure that adequate safety measures have been taken.

When considering the level of care, a beneficial question to ask is:

Given what a person in my position should know or could reasonably foresee, what steps can I put in place to ensure that those under my care are being afforded an environment which is as safe and respectful as I can reasonably provide?

Buildings and grounds must be made safe for children. Parents need the security of knowing that there are no hidden dangers within our facilities. Achieving safety involves following some very practical safeguards that prevent accidents or unfortunate incidents.

The physical wellbeing of property is the responsibility of the local church. It is recognised that the vast majority of our congregations meet in rented facilities and as such should do what is reasonable to ensure that properties are safe for children and young people. A regular audit should be done to review the safety of the physical environment. This check should be carried out yearly and if required, in connection with the review of rental agreements.

Programs

In our quest to provide a healthy environment where children are safe, we must examine the aspects of our programs that may provide an opportunity for children to be abused and minimise these opportunities. During the planning process, team leaders and volunteers will take into consideration the age appropriateness and personality types of the children to encourage a positive atmosphere. While segregation of boys and girls for some activities may be beneficial, it is important that leaders carefully assess the appropriateness of any activities that exploit these differences.

In addition to this, the assessment of possible risk to participants and spectators is taken into consideration during the planning process and monitored throughout the duration of the program.

All those who attend an activity should be encouraged to participate to the level of their ability and desire. However, a child must never feel forced or bullied into participating in an activity. Alternatively, children should not be singled out for special attention as this may result in other children feeling resentment, or an increase in competing for the leader's/helper's attention.

While hugging, kisses and other forms of appropriate physical affection between workers and children are important for a child's development, it is generally recommended that workers cease from engaging in these activities in our church setting.

People

It is important that the task of recruiting and selecting leadership for programs is taken seriously and done carefully. As a rule, the more that is known about a person and his/her experience with children, the better the decision will be about that person's ability for leadership.

The effectiveness of screening prospective volunteers is reliant on the availability of accurate information on the volunteer. There is always the potential for a person to be a 'first time offender'. As a result, we can never become complacent by relying on screening alone to ensure harm will not occur. However, the use of a thorough screening process is an essential step in helping reduce the risk of harms occurring.

The local pastor will assess volunteers for their suitability to work in children's ministry.

All volunteers and applicants should possess and agree to support the church's Statement of Beliefs and our youth ministries Code of Conduct for team leaders and volunteers as outlined in the Child Safety Protocols document.

All youth workers must meet their states minimum requirements for working with children and young people.

Responsibilities of the Denomination

Grace Communion International Limited has a responsibility to provide leadership and support to local congregations in the area of youth ministry.

This responsibility is expressed in a variety of ways, by:

- notifying local congregations of new legislative requirements in child protection;
- providing leadership and consultation opportunities with local congregations on Child Protection issues;
- advising congregations of training opportunities;
- recommending guidelines that will improve the running of children's ministry;
- providing a voice at a denominational level on matters relating to children's ministry;

- supporting smaller churches in the implementation of recommended guidelines and policies;
- working with other denominations in increasing the standard of children's ministry; and,
- exploring new ways of providing culturally relevant children's ministry.

Responsibilities of the Local Congregation

A similar priority should be placed on the aesthetics of children's ministry areas as for the church sanctuary. The oversight of the application of this policy in the local church shall be the responsibility of the congregation and local Pastor.

The local church is responsible for the appointment of suitable leaders as required. Until a leader is competent, the congregation must provide adequate supervision for new leaders. Where ministries are co-educational, it is desirable that the church provide both male and female leadership.

Congregations are encouraged to look annually at their own situation and decide how they are getting on, and what needs to be done next to ensure the safety of children and young people. This will include an annual safety audit and the annual training of those working with children and young people.

It is important that congregations provide children with the opportunity and encouragement to voice their suggestions or feelings at church, ministry meetings or special forums. By inviting their participation, the church communicates to the children their value and contribution to church life, especially those areas directly affecting them.

Where possible every congregation shall appoint a Child Safety Officer. The role of the Child Safety Officer is to:

- facilitate and promote the dissemination of information on risk management and the protection of children and young people;
- advise on and possibly facilitate training opportunities for all who work directly or indirectly with children and young people;
- facilitate such vetting procedures as may be required in respect of would-be volunteer workers;
- be available to leaders and others associated with the congregation who may wish to express concerns relating to practices or procedures;
- monitor, on behalf of the congregation, the continuing implementation of this code of good practice by all ministries under the oversight of the congregation; and,
- liaise with their local Pastor and/or LAC who are responsible for the use of church properties, to ensure that such groups are aware of the safety protocols, and that the properties are maintained in such a way as to protect children.

The role of the Child Safety Officer is a responsible one.

This person should show competence, maturity and experience in this area and be one who attracts the respect and trust of others.

Responsibilities of Leaders and Helpers

Youth ministry volunteers (both leaders and helpers) carry a heavy weight of responsibility for modeling Christianity and influencing those entrusted to them. Inherent in this position comes authority and power, which may be open to abuse. It is recognised that a volunteer's simple request can be a seemingly impossible expectation for a child to decline. Children are often taught not to question the authority of adults, and from a child's perspective, to not conform would normally result in punishment or loss of privileges. It is therefore imperative that all volunteers:

- conduct themselves in a way that reflects the values of God's kingdom;
- show that all children are respected and their opinions valued;
- be a voice to the wider church for the concerns of children;

- encourage and praise children in their development; and,
- allow children to make mistakes.

Youth ministry leaders also have a responsibility to the parents to provide a positive environment for their children and to notify the parents of all planned programs, including any changes or delays.

Responsibilities of Parents

The role of parenting is a vital one and implies responsibility as the primary care giver for the child. Parents have the primary responsibility in training their children with regards to their spiritual development and the church is happy to help assist this process through its youth ministry programs and activities. In this light, youth ministry leaders look to partner with parents in developing a ministry that meets the needs of the local congregation.

Parents place high expectations on churches to provide the best care possible for their children. To this end, parents and primary care givers are expected to support their local youth ministry by completing various Child Safety Documents. For example, the Personal and Medical Information – Family (PPL4f) form is designed for communicating important medical information to youth ministry volunteers. It is important that parents communicate to youth ministry leaders that their child is required to take any self-administered medication so that the leaders can monitor this. It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that the church has up-to-date information on their child as can be reasonably expected. A church's ability to properly care for a child is diminished when this information is not communicated. Any information gathered will be stored and accessed according to privacy legislation.

General rule for handling suspicions or allegations of harm

Our role is to care for the person involved, not to investigate if harm has actually occurred. Never minimise an allegation of harm or the impact it has on the victim. Dismissing an allegation may increase the effect of the harm and prolong the healing process. When harm is suspected or reported, it must be treated as an allegation or suspicion. You are to report the harm to the Pastor or another designated person immediately and encourage the child to make a formal allegation to the designated person. The designated person will decide what the appropriate course of action is.

Due to the autonomy of Grace Communion International Limited, the primary responsibility of ensuring any allegations of harm are properly responded to lies with the local church. The Pastor or designated person is responsible to contact the head office and the National Youth Ministries Coordinator. The local Pastor or designated person will be responsible for:

- **Coordinating and communicating** with the various authorities, the local church and relevant youth ministry representatives, legal counsel, and the church's insurer;
- **Reviewing** the factors that allowed harm to occur; and
- **Recommending** additional ways to reduce the risk of harm.

Cases of Family Violence, Sexual or Physical Abuse

If you are concerned that a child faces physical, emotional or sexual abuse, these steps should be taken:

In an emergency contact the local police immediately. Contact the following departments:

- QLD – Department of Child Safety, 07 3884 8800 after hours 07 3235 9999
- VIC – Department of Human Services Crisis Line 131 278
- NSW – DOCS Helpline, 132 111 or 02 9633 77698

- WA - Department of Community Development

Contact can be made anonymously and is confidential. Carefully follow any instruction you may be given.

If the abuse is happening within a congregational activity, you must report the incident to the Pastor and the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, immediately.

Good Practice to Minimise Situations of Abuse Risk

- As far as possible, an adult should never be left alone with a child or young person in a place or a room which cannot be easily observed by others.
- Ensure that all those who work with children and young people never meet a child or young person off the church property except in the presence of a parent or other adult.
- Never take a group off the premises with fewer than two adults.
- An attendance book should be signed when a parent/guardian drops off and picks up children and young people for an activity.
- Consider carefully the use of premises and access to buildings. Children or young people should not have to walk along a dark unsupervised path in order to enter or leave a church meeting place.
- Where children or young people have to be transported by car, minibus, etc., arrange to have more than one passenger in the vehicle.
- Remember that good practice is as much a benefit to the adult worker as it is to the child or young person. Wrongful allegations or misunderstandings on the part of children or others are by no means uncommon.



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Guidelines for Local Churches

- Adopt these protocols on safeguarding the welfare of children and young people, together with guidelines.
- Appoint a Child Safety Officer who is aware of the ministry with children and young people in your church as well as safety procedures.
- Plan the work of the local church so as to minimise situations where the safety of children may be compromised.
- Make an annual safety check of buildings, grounds and gardens.
- Introduce a system where children and young people may talk with an appropriately trained independent person.
- The minimum age for a leader in a children's/young people's activity shall be 18 years.

- Apply agreed procedures for protecting children and young people to all staff (paid and volunteer). Have regular in-service training concerning these procedures.
- Give all who work with children or young people clear roles.
- Keep in contact with leaders—use supervision as a means of protecting children.
- Treat all would-be workers, paid and volunteer, as job applicants for any position involving contact with children.
 - Obtain a reference from a person who has had experience of the applicant’s work with children.
 - Interview before appointment, exploring the applicants’ experience of working or their contact with children or young people.
 - Find out whether an applicant has any conviction for criminal offences against children or young people.
 - Make all appointments conditional upon successful completion of a probationary period.
- Provide all workers, paid and volunteer, with guidelines on how to deal with the disclosure or discovery of abuse.
- Institute a training program on the prevention of child abuse for all staff, paid or volunteer.
- Be aware of the normal health and development needs of all children and young people in regular church activities. Pay attention to a child’s or young person’s normal patterns and any sudden changes in behaviour.
- Make a regular safety check on children’s/young people’s activities, checking:
 1. Is the adult : child ratio appropriate for the activity in terms of the age and stage of development of the children and young people involved?
 2. Is the venue safe?
 3. Are the children and/or young people signed in and out as part of the parent/guardian drop-off and pick-up procedures?
 4. Are the use and selection of curriculum material for worship, children’s church and other children’s/young people’s programs appropriate?
 5. Are leaders and assistant leaders a suitable age?