

Grace Chapel Castle Rock

Child Protection Policy

“And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. 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 18:5-6

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

As a church, we believe that the spiritual, emotional and physical well being of children is vital. This Child Protection Policy is intended to ensure that church activities involving children are consistent with the teachings and example of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the Christian tradition of nurturing vulnerable children, and to provide compliance with local, state and federal government rules and regulations.

The primary purpose of this policy is to promote the safety and well being of children and youth by providing clear instruction regarding the operation of children’s and youth ministries at Grace Chapel Castle Rock.

As ambassadors of Jesus Christ, we must strive to be worthy of a very high standard of trust. For this reason, every worker at Grace Chapel Castle Rock must avoid even the appearance of inappropriate behavior. All workers must diligently avoid any conduct that appears wrong to a reasonable observer, even if no actual misconduct takes place.

Workers in children’s and youth ministry are expected to observe these policies and guidelines as well as other Christian standards of moral behavior.

ADMINISTRATION

1. Supervision

- a. The Child Protection Policy will be administered and monitored by the Grace Chapel Castle Rock Security Ministry. The Security Ministry is a sub-committee of the Deacon Board.
- b. The Security Ministry answers directly to the Deacon Board who, in turn, answer directly to the Board of Elders.
- c. The Board of Elders has ultimate authority over the implementation of this policy.

2. Annual Review

- a. The Security Ministry will review compliance with safety policies and potential risks in a brief written report to the Deacon Board and Board of Elders annually.

- b. This report should contain:
 - i. A review of changes in the law and of new legal precedents which impact child protection, and suggested changes in the Child Protection Policy for consideration by the Deacon Board and Board of Elders.
 - ii. Annual review of policy implementation and compliance.
 - iii. Recommendations regarding policy changes necessary to better facilitate children and youth ministries.

3. Modification of Policy

- a. This policy may be modified or withdrawn at any time by the Security Ministry following acceptance by the Deacon Board and authorization by the Board of Elders.
- b. Any ministry seeking a modification to the Child Protection Policy must submit requests to the Security Ministry for consideration.

4. Policy Compliance

- a. This policy governs the activities of paid staff and volunteers in the Children's and Youth Ministries of Grace Chapel Castle Rock.
- b. Willful failure of paid staff to comply with this policy may, at the discretion of the Board of Elders, result in disciplinary action up to termination of employment.
- c. Willful failure of volunteers to comply with this policy may, at the discretion of the Board of Elders, result in removal from the ministry, and any future involvement with children and youth ministry will not be allowed until such time as the Board of Elders authorizes.

OPERATING POLICIES

1. Activities Covered By This Policy

- a. For the purposes of this policy, any reference to a child, youth or minor means a person under eighteen (18) years of age.
- b. Grace Chapel Castle Rock interprets the above guideline to mean that the following activities of the church must observe this policy:
 - i. Nursery
 - ii. Preschool
 - iii. Elementary
 - iv. Youth, including middle school, high school and post high school under the age of 18.

2. Selection of Children's and Youth Ministry Workers

- a. **Paid Staff Member:** Every applicant for any paid position must complete an employment application and consent form authorizing a background check. In the absence of such a completed form, applicants will not be considered for employment by the Church. No person will be employed before the Church has received and reviewed the applicant's completed employment application and completed background and at least 2 reference checks. Any paid staff member will be expected to sign the Children's Worker Renewal Form Annually. The employment application and reference checks will be placed in secured personnel files of the administrative offices. Only staff members, deacons, or elders having a reasonable need for information contained in these files will be allowed to access them. All Paid Staff Members and Adult Volunteers Level 1 shall be required to fill out The Children's/Youth Worker Renewal Form for each subsequent Sunday School Teaching Year after filling out an application and submitting to an initial background check.
- b. **Adult Volunteers Level 1:** Level 1 volunteers work closely with children and youth, assuming a supervisory role over other volunteers who assist them. As a condition of volunteer work with children and youth, the prospective volunteer must have been a member or regular attendee of Grace Chapel Castle Rock for six (6) consecutive months immediately preceding commencement of the volunteer work. All prospective Level 1 Volunteer children and youth workers must complete a volunteer worker application. No person will be accepted for Level 1 Volunteer service before the Church has received and reviewed the application and has completed at least 2 reference checks and background checks. Any Adult Volunteers Level 1 will be expected to sign the Children's Worker Renewal Form Annually. All current Level 1 Volunteer children and youth workers are expected to have a completed volunteer worker application on file. All information gathered from volunteer worker applications, including reference and background checks, will be held by the Church in confidential files. Only staff members, deacons, or elders having a reasonable need for information contained in these files will be allowed to access them.
- c. **Adult Volunteer Level 2:** Level 2 Volunteers are workers who occasionally interact with minors and/or do so in less risky circumstances. For example, a volunteer who works with children or youth only in a group setting, on church property and with a Staff member or Level 1 Volunteer present would be considered a Level 2 Volunteer. Level 2 Volunteers should not be left alone with children or youth. All Adult Volunteer Level 2 volunteers will submit an application to work with children/youth and submit to a background check. Should Adult Volunteer Level 1 work with children/youth shall complete and sign The Children's/Youth Worker Renewal Form for any subsequent years beyond the initial year.
- d. **Youth Volunteer:** Young people 7th grade to age 18 are welcome to serve as assistant leaders under the direct supervision of Staff or Level 1 Volunteers.
- e. **Change in the status:** Should an undesirable change in the status of any person working with children/youth occur and come to the attention on the managing Staff Member, that Staff Member must immediately address that issue with that person to confirm it. If confirmed, and detrimental for that person to continue to work with children/youth, that person must be asked to resign and have no further contact with children/youth, a denotation of reason for separation must be noted in file (to remain locked area) and that Staff Member must notify their superior of this change.

3. Supervision of Children's and Youth Workers

Church staff and volunteers who supervise children and youth workers are required to comply with this policy.

- a. At times, a Level 1 Volunteer may be the sole worker in the room, provided that another Level 1 Volunteer or Staff member is present in a “roving” capacity between several rooms.
- b. A Level 1 Volunteer or staff member is allowed to be alone with one youth age 12 or older only under the following circumstances:
 - i. If the meeting is conducted in the church building, another staff member must be present in the same building at all times during the meeting, and a door to the meeting area, such as an office, must be open at all times during the meeting.
 - ii. If the meeting is conducted off church premises, permission must be obtained from at least one of the youth’s parents authorizing such meeting(s).
- c. For overnight activities, or when activities leave the immediate church property except as provided in paragraph b. above, the following procedures will apply: Two or more Staff members or Level 1 Volunteers must be present and must include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed gender. For an all-female group, at least one of the Staff or Level 1 Volunteers must be female. For an all-male group, at least one of the Staff or Level 1 Volunteers must be male. For a one-on-one meeting with a female youth, one of the volunteers must be female.
- d. Should a child need to use the restroom during Sunday School, the following protocol shall be used. If there aren't 2 volunteers (1 to cover class and the other to escort the child needing to use the restroom, then the teacher shall call security and security will escort that child to the restroom. The security person will escort the child to the restroom and prescreen the restroom (to be sure it's empty) then once verified, allow the child to go to the restroom. Should the child needing the bathroom be 5 or under, then when possible an adult female volunteer shall accompany the child to and from the bathroom.

4. Check In/Check Out Policy

- a. A check-in/ check-out system will be used for all children in the nursery and pre-school. Parents must check the children in and, unless otherwise authorized by that parent in writing, only that parent may pick up the child.
- b. The State of Colorado recognizes 12 years of age as a benchmark for allowing a child to be unsupervised for short periods of time. Grace Chapel Castle Rock requires that all children under the age of 12 who are taking part in a children’s ministry activity/event will not be unsupervised.
- c. Children from kindergarten through 6th grade under the age of 12 will not be released from Staff or Level 1 Volunteer supervision until a parent or guardian is present to pick them up.

5. Classroom

Classrooms will have doors with windows or “dutch” doors. Parents are welcome to visit their child’s classroom at any time. We request that parents check in with the teacher prior to entering the classroom to minimize any disruption of the lesson.

6. Touching Policy

We live in an age where child abuse is a reality in our society. The church should deal with this issue as a “good shepherd” by taking steps to protect children in our care. Our touching policy is designed to safeguard our children while promoting a positive, nurturing environment for them. The guidelines below are to be carefully followed by anyone working with children and youth.

- a. Appropriate physical affection between workers and children can be important for a child's development and are generally suitable in our church setting.
- b. Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a four year old to sit in a nursery worker's lap and give a kiss on the cheek, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave in the same manner.)
- c. Touching should be initiated by the child or youth. It should be a response to the child's need for comfort, encouragement or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.
- d. Touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children' ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two or more adult workers are present and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom.
- e. Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers, our behavior must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach.
- f. A child's preference not to be touched should be respected implicitly. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.
- g. Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader, staff or a pastor.
- h. Should a child become agitated enough to threaten themselves or other children with emotional or physical damaging behavior, the supervising children/youth worker must intercede and prevent any harm from being done in the most mild manner possible. Prior to this occurring (and only if the behavior escalates quickly), the supervising children/youth worker should call the responsible overseeing staff member to intervene.

MANDATORY REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE

Colorado Statutory Definitions of Child Abuse

1. Neglect: Any case in which a child is in need of services because the child's parents, legal guardian, or custodian fails to take the same actions to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision that a prudent parent would take. C.R.S. 19-1-103

2. Physical: Any case in which a child exhibits evidence of skin bruising, bleeding, malnutrition, failure to thrive, burns, fracture of any bone, subdural hematoma, soft tissue swelling, or death and either: Such condition or death is not justifiably explained; the history given concerning such condition is at variance with the degree or type of such condition or death; or the circumstances indicate that such condition may not be the product of an accidental occurrence. C.R.S. 19-1-103

Emotional: Any case in which a child is subjected to emotional abuse. As used in this sub-paragraph (IV), emotional abuse means an identifiable and substantial impairment of the child's intellectual or psychological functioning or development or substantial risk of impairment of the child's intellectual or psychological functioning or development. C.R.S. 19-1-103

Sexual: Any case in which a child is subjected to sexual assault or molestation, sexual exploitation, or prostitution.
C.R.S. 19-1-103

The elements of the Colorado statutory definition of child “abuse” or “child abuse or neglect” means an act of omission in one of the following categories which threatens the health and welfare of a child: (i) “Any case in which the child exhibits evidence of skin bruising, bleeding, malnutrition, failure to thrive, burns, fracture of any bone, subdural hematoma (a local swelling or tumor filled with effused blood), soft tissue swelling, or death,” **and** “condition or death is not justifiably explained; the history given concerning such condition is at variance with the degree of type of such condition or death; or the circumstances indicate that such condition may not be the product of an accidental occurrence.” (ii) “Any case in which a child is subjected to sexual assault or molestation, sexual exploitation, or prostitution.” (iii) “Any case in which a child is in need of services because the child’s parents, legal guardian, or custodian fails to take the same actions to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision that a prudent parent would take...” (iv) “Any case involving acts or omissions by the parents or other caregivers that have caused, or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders.”

“In all cases, those investigating reports of child abuse shall take into account accepted child-rearing practices of the culture in which the child participates. Nothing in this subsection shall refer to acts which could be construed to be a reasonable exercise of parental discipline...” (Note: For additional information on child maltreatment, you may contact the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information at nccanch@calib.com.)

Clergy Members as Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect

“Clergy Members” is a new class of mandated reporters under Senate Bill 02-210, concerning mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect, as approved by the Colorado General Assembly and signed into law by the Governor on June 3, 2002. The statutory definition of Clergy Member is as follows: “Unless the context otherwise requires, ‘clergy member’ means a priest, rabbi, duly ordained, commissioned, or licensed minister of a church, member of a religious order, or recognized leader of any religious body.” The statute does not define “recognized leader of any religious body”.

Grace Chapel Castle Rock Mandatory Reporters

Anyone in the church who has been placed, or has been allowed to be, in charge of others should assume they are mandated reporters and comply with the reporting law. The definition of “recognized leader” may thus include elders, deacons, staff, nursery supervisory staff, Sunday school teachers, and perhaps small group or other lay leaders.

Determining Suspected Child Abuse

It is not the responsibility of Church personnel to make judgment whether child abuse and/or neglect has in fact occurred. Rather, it is our responsibility to assess whether there is “reasonable suspicion” of abuse and/or neglect and, if so, to report it accordingly.

Any suspected or alleged child abuse, or any questionable activity involving children or youth, is to be reported immediately to either the Children’s Director or Youth Pastor, as appropriate, or to any elder. It is the responsibility of the staff member or elder to then immediately report the suspected abuse to the Senior Pastor. If the Children’s Director, Youth Pastor, or elders are not immediately available, it is the responsibility of the reporting person to provide the information directly to the Senior Pastor.

Due to the sensitive nature of these issues, it is the policy of the Church to adhere to procedural guidelines of the Douglas County Department of Social Services in determining whether there is reasonable suspicion that child abuse may have occurred. Great care must be used during interviews to protect against an adverse affect upon subsequent investigations. To the maximum extent possible, and as appropriate given the circumstances of each complaint, allegation or observation, the Church will attempt to do the following:

- a. Immediate child abuse assessment to determine if there is reasonable cause for the case to be reported to the authorities.
- b. Interview alleged victim with or without the presence of his or her parent(s), depending upon the circumstances, with interests of the child paramount. Under no circumstances is the child to be interviewed with the alleged abuser present. The child should never be asked to show his or her private areas. The interviewer should be careful not to ask leading questions.
- c. If deemed appropriate to continue the inquiry, interview the accused.
- d. Interview supervisor of the accused (if any).
- e. Interview witnesses (if any).

Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and/or Neglect

Every mandated reporter who reasonably suspects that a child has been subjected to abuse and/or neglect, or who has witnessed circumstances which would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, must immediately report the same to the Douglas County Department of Human Services or the Douglas County Sheriff's Department. If there is evidence the child is in immediate danger, the appropriate law enforcement agency should be called. Otherwise, the department of human services should be the primary contact. When a report is made to a human services agency, confidentiality of the reporter is initially protected. Such confidentiality does not exist when reporting to a law enforcement agency.

Communications With the Press

Only the Church's designated spokesperson should speak to the media concerning any alleged or reported child abuse or neglect. The Church family will be kept informed, as appropriate, when the complaint or allegation is publicly reported. The Senior Pastor will fulfill this role unless absent whereupon the Board of Elders leader will assume this responsibility.

FINAL THOUGHT

As horrendous as false accusations can be, it is essential that we take seriously and act expeditiously on every allegation of abusive behavior whether it involves Church employees, volunteers, members, attendees, families of children or youth involved in Church ministries and Church-sponsored events. Once again, Grace Chapel Castle Rock is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for those children and youth entrusted to teaching and care.