

Safe Church Policies and Guidelines For Children from Preschool through Grade 6 Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church

Supervision of Children

The Children's Ministry staff and volunteers are responsible for the supervision of children during ministry activities, including observing the environment and equipment for unsafe situations, removing children from potentially dangerous conditions, and reporting problems immediately. Ministry staff should make sure that anyone who has not been successfully screened does not have unsupervised access to children. Supervision of children will be guided by the two-adult rule described in the next section.

Parents are responsible for their children up until the time the activity is scheduled to begin and after the activity's scheduled ending time. Leaders are responsible for informing parents of the beginning and ending times. When children arrive to any church ministry or program, they are expected to remain in that program until the program ends and supervision is transferred back to parents. Children may not leave the program early without a parent's permission. A child's failure to follow this policy will be considered unacceptable behavior, and discipline policies will be enforced (see separate section on discipline). Children's ministry leaders are not responsible for children who do not show up at a ministry activity, even if their parents believe they are at the activity.

The Two-Adult Rule

The Two-Adult Rule states that there must always be two non-related adults present when supervising one or more children. This rule is designed for the safety of children as well as adults, and is required across all ministry areas with few exceptions (see guidelines for these cases below). Planning ahead will help avoid the potential of being alone with one or more children. Compliance to the two-adult rule includes the following:

- There must always be two volunteer approved adults present when supervising one or more children.
- The adults must not be related family members (a married couple would be considered "related"). If two related adults are teaching together, a third screened person must be in attendance.
- The adults should be in sight of each other at all times.

Exceptions to the Two-Adult Rule

The purpose of the Two-Adult Rule is to make sure the actions of any one leader are known to at least one other leader and to encourage leaders to support each other in ministry. Guidelines for exceptions to the Two-Adult Rule (outlined below) follow this same idea—that even when only one adult is present, the actions of that leader are known and visible to others. This is accomplished by visible and public locations, as well as communication with other ministry staff.

Unplanned Situations with Only One Adult

Occasionally, leaders will find themselves without another adult present due to unforeseen circumstances. The following procedures should be followed.

- ***Immediately inform the Program Director, Director of Children's Ministry or Associate Director of Children's Ministry***
- ***Visible location***--For any time when there is only one adult present, the group must be in a location that is visible to others with an unobstructed window, open door, etc.

Youth Serving as Leaders

We encourage older children to serve as leaders for children in younger grades. A youth leader, age 14 or older, may count as an adult under the Two-Adult Rule.

Check In and Check Out Procedures

Parents are responsible for their child until their child is checked into and once their child is checked out of a church ministry program. Programs serving children from Preschool through Grade 2 should have check in and out procedures which require the parent to sign in when they bring the child to the program and sign out when they pick up the child at the end of the program. This means that parents are expected to escort their child to the check in area and that children in Preschool through Grade 2 should not be released from a program or activity without parents coming to pick them up and signing them out.

Children may not leave the program early without a parent's permission. If a child wanders away from the program or leaves the church campus without a parent's permission, an adult leader should immediately alert the Program Director who will contact the parents.

Exceptions to the Check In and Check Out Procedures

On "Moment with Children" Sundays and in Intersections, parents will not need to sign in their children when they are dismissed from the church. Procedures will be in place by the Children's Ministry Staff and volunteers to ensure that all children leaving the church will arrive safely to their classroom.

Bathroom Procedures

Preschool and Kindergarten children use the restrooms within the classrooms. Adults must not enter a private restroom with a child. If there are no restrooms within the classroom, children must be escorted to the restrooms. Children in grades 1-6 must be escorted (it can be a youth leader) to the restroom. The escort must take at least 2 children of the same gender. The escort must determine if anyone is in the restroom. If the restroom is empty, the children may go in and the escort must remain outside the restroom and listen for the children in the restroom. If someone is in the restroom, enter the restroom with the children (if same gender)

or wait until it is empty. If another person arrives, go into the restroom (if it's for your gender) and stay there while the children use the facility.

It is understood that having an adult taking children to the bathroom may leave one adult alone in the room with multiple children for a short period of time.

Discipline

The number one rule in ministry with children is that **Each of us is a Child of God** and should be treated with the kind of respect, love, and support that is expected by the commandment in Scripture to love one another.

Clear rules and expectations and consistent messages about behavior are the key to effective discipline procedures. Occasionally, children have trouble following the rules or display disruptive behavior. In these cases, the following steps will be taken.

1. The teacher or leader will talk with the child and state clearly what the problem behavior is and what the child should do instead. For a younger child, the leader will attempt to redirect the child to another activity.
2. If the child continues to exhibit problem behavior, the teacher/leader will give a warning to the child and have the program or ministry area leader talk individually to the child.
3. Upon the third warning, the child will be removed from the activity and a parent will be contacted. Unless otherwise discussed with a parent, the child will be welcomed back at the next ministry activity.

Zero Tolerance

There will be zero tolerance for behavior that is deemed out of control by the teacher or leader.

1. Behavior deemed out of control will result in immediate removal of the child from the ministry activity and personal family contact by the Ministry Staff.
2. If the offense is an illegal activity, the police will be contacted.
3. The child may be suspended from ministry activities for an amount of time determined by the Director of Children's Ministry.
4. The child and family will be treated with respect and love, and the child will be welcomed back to ministry activities after the suspension period provided he/she is ready to respect the rules of the ministry.

Physical Contact

Respect, safety, and appropriate boundaries are the guiding principles for physical contact between ministry leaders and children. The guidelines below are intended to avoid contact that is or may appear threatening or inappropriate.

Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth. Examples of **positive and appropriate** forms of affection:

- Brief hugs or side hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- High-fives, hand slapping and fist taps
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms of children or youth
- Arm around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Holding hands during group prayer

The following forms of affection are considered **inappropriate** with children and youth in ministry. Many of these behaviors are used by child molesters to groom children or youth and their parents for later molestation. Others may be considered to be sexual abuse.

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kisses
- Holding children over three years old on the lap
- Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas or other private rooms
- Occupying a bed with a child or youth
- Touching knees or legs of children or youth
- Wrestling with children or youth
- Tickling children or youth
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a child or youth
- Any form of unwanted affection
- Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development
- Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touch of underwear whether or not it is covered by other clothing
- Giving gifts or money to individual children or youth
- Private meals with individual children or youth

Sleepovers

There are no sleepover activities for children in Preschool through Grade 6.

Field Trips/Driving

Only in very rare circumstances, pre-approved by the Director of Children's Ministry, will field trips occur for 6th Grade children only. If children are taken off campus, parents must be pre-informed and must pre-approve the trip. If the children are transported in vehicles, signed releases and "Consent to Treat" must be obtained and carried on the field trip. All children under 12 must be transported in the rear seat(s) and each must have their own seat belt. Drivers must be over 21 and have had their driver's licenses for at least 3 years. Vehicles used must be fully insured.

Communication Outside of Usual Ministry Functions:

All communication to preschool and kindergarten children should be through the parents. Leaders of children may call children in their program if the leader first talks to the parent and gets verbal permission. Leaders may send notes to children on postcards (not in envelopes). Leaders of children may e-mail children only if the leader also cc's the parent. Leaders of children should not contact children through Instant Messaging, social networking sites, text messaging, or other forms of electronic communication except phone and email.

Emergencies and Injuries

Ministry staff and volunteers should be prepared to protect children in the case of emergencies. Volunteers should have the following phone numbers programmed into their cell phones. Note that 911 calls by cell phones are often not as direct as dialing the local emergency authorities.

Sunnyvale Emergency: 911

If calling from a cell phone, immediately tell operator

"I have a medical emergency in Sunnyvale, CA"

Sunnyvale Police (nonemergency): 730-7100

Church Office: 408-739-1892 (business hours are 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday)

During worship, the Church Emergency Medical Team can be activated by sending someone to alert an usher in the Narthex.

Medical Supplies

A number of basic medical supplies are located in the closet in the men's room in the narthex of the sanctuary as well as in room 702, and an AED is located in the church office. For medical problems that require more serious attention call 911 or local emergency phone number.

Threats of Violence Against Others or to Harm Self

Leaders may receive information that a child or other person has thoughts or desires to harm themselves or others. This information should be taken seriously and should be reported **immediately** to the Director of Children's Ministry or a Pastor. If the child seems to have the imminent intent to do harm, a leader or volunteer should stay with the child and call 911.

Criminal or Potentially Dangerous Activity

A leader should call 911 or local emergency number immediately in cases of suspected criminal or dangerous activities on the church campus or near ministry activities.

Earthquake or Other Disaster

See *Earthquake Procedures* posted in classrooms.

Responding & Reporting

All leaders and volunteers are expected to report any suspicious, careless, or problematic behavior of adults and youth leaders to their supervisor. Leaders should trust their instinct if something doesn't look quite right. If a leader notices any signs that a child may have been abused or neglected, concerns should be reported immediately to the supervisor. It is very important to report any incidents or behavior that could possibly be considered signs of abuse. Overreacting is better than under reacting. The supervisor will decide how to proceed or will consult with church staff members about how to respond.

Concerns about suspected or actual child abuse or the behaviors of leaders and volunteers should be shared only with the program supervisor and those directly involved in the reporting process (e.g., church staff members, Child Protective Services) and not with anyone else.

Screening and Training:

Screening and Training can be done in any order, but all components are required to become an approved Children's Ministry Volunteer. You only need to complete these tasks once to become approved. There is no annual recertification required.

Screening and training include:

- Attending 1 ½ hour training "Safeguarding God's Children for Parents & Congregations" and "Safeguarding God's Children for Ministries"
- Reviewing and understanding SVPC's General Safe Church Principals and this document
- Completing an application for "Adults Working with Children and Youth", providing references which will be checked
- Completing Live Scan fingerprinting and DOJ criminal background check