

Sovereign Grace Church
Children's Ministry Handbook

Revised May 2016

The purpose of Children's Ministry is to assist and support the church's parents in teaching their children to know, love, and experience God. This is done through establishing a safe and secure environment on Sunday mornings where teaching, worship, and other activities take place consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the standards of His Word.

The Children's Ministry includes the Sunday morning classes from preschool through elementary school age. All teaching, policies, procedures, and decisions within the Children's Ministry are under the oversight of church pastor.

Structure/Organization

1. Campus Pastor
2. Team Leaders
3. Classroom Teachers
4. Classroom Helpers

Classroom Teachers and Helpers

Only members of Sovereign Grace Church will be considered for service in Children's Ministry, unless special approval is granted by the pastor over the Children's Ministry.

In order to be considered for the position of teacher or helper, you must:

1. Read and agree to support all the policies and procedures in this manual
2. Fill out a Volunteer Workers Application

We reserve the right to conduct appropriate background checks of present and prospective members (and any other persons) who are involved in or who seek to participate in our Children's Ministry. Such checks may include, but are not limited to, criminal history record checks, sex offender registry checks in the appropriate state(s), and any other checks that we determine, in our sole discretion, may be appropriate. We will normally assume all costs for all checks that we conduct. If such a background check or any other information obtained by the church reveals that an applicant or worker, in the church's sole discretion, may pose any threat to minors (or other vulnerable persons), we reserve the right, in our sole discretion, to exclude that individual from participating in Children's Ministry and to take all other steps necessary to address the situation, including but not limited to meeting with the person, restricting or limiting the person's contact with children through the church, and, if applicable, confronting the person about any misrepresentation or concealment of relevant past conduct.

Two Teacher Policy

For the safety and protection of our children, teachers, and helpers, we will seek to have all children participating in the Children's Ministry be in the presence of at least two teachers or helpers.

Children's Ministry workers are not permitted to take children from the premises.

Discipline Policy

According to Scripture, parents bear the primary responsibility for training and disciplining their children. Therefore, Children's Ministry teachers and helpers are not to "discipline" children, other than to provide verbal instruction and correction, or to move individuals in order to separate disorderly children.

If a child continues to be uncooperative after being clearly made aware of what is expected, the classroom teacher should speak gently and appeal lovingly to the child. If the child does not respond, a parent/guardian is to be called from the meeting and informed about the problem.

How to call a parent

1. A volunteer should first seek to text the parent/guardian using the phone number provided on the sign-in sheet.
2. If a parent does not respond to the text, ask an usher to obtain the child's parent/guardian from the service.
3. When interacting with the parent/guardian, always speak kindly and demonstrate humility.
4. Teen helpers should not have the responsibility or authority to explain to a parent/guardian the reason they've been requested.
5. If there is any difficulty in interacting with a parent, notify a team leader or the campus pastor.

Bathroom Policy

No child is ever allowed to leave the classroom unescorted.

If a bathroom break is needed, a children's ministry volunteer must contact the parent/guardian to escort their child to the bathroom.

Teachers and helpers are not permitted to change diapers. Any child who needs a diaper change must wait for the parent/guardian to be called.

Sickness Policy

Parents are asked to keep their children out of Children's Ministry classes if:

1. The child has been sick or has had a fever within 24 hours of the Sunday morning service
2. The child has a runny nose (unless the child is known to have allergies and the nose is running clear)
3. The child has a wound that is oozing

If a child is diagnosed with a communicable disease (head lice, chicken pox, etc.) within five days of attending a Children’s Ministry class, the parents should notify a Children’s Ministry team leader or the campus pastor.

Scheduled teachers and helpers should not be in the classrooms if they have been sick or have had a fever within 24 hours of the Sunday morning service. In this case, it is your responsibility to secure a replacement.

Medical Attention Procedure

Please do not attempt to administer any medical help on your own. If a child should require medical attention at any time during the children’s ministry, the following procedures must be followed:

Classroom Teacher	Head Usher	Emergency Response Team
1. Contact the Head Usher and report emergency and family name.	1. After receiving emergency information from teacher, contact Emergency Response Team and parent of child.	1. Care for child and assess if further medical attention is needed.
2. Keep child still and calm.	2. Direct emergency worker and parent to child’s location.	2. If necessary, designated emergency response team member should clean and disinfect the area of the incident.
3. Direct helper to lead students to nearest classroom.		
4. After parent and emergency team arrives, rejoin students for the remainder of the class.		

Emergency Evacuation Procedure

In the event of an emergency, all children attending the Children’s Ministry will be safely evacuated from the building to provide parents/guardians with the assurance that their children are safe.

1. Teachers and helpers shall use the attendance roster to keep an accurate record of children coming and going from the classroom during Children’s Ministry.
2. When an emergency drill has started or the alarm sounds, teachers and helpers shall remind the children to remain quiet and shall take a head count before leaving the room.
3. Remind the children to stay together and move quickly to the established evacuation rally point.
4. The preschool age classes will have ushers come to the classrooms to assist in the evacuation of the children.

5. An usher will check the bathrooms and classrooms to make sure that everyone has evacuated the building.
6. A teacher or helper in each classroom will take the attendance roster with them and once at the rally point, a head count should again be taken.
7. A team leader will come to each class to ascertain if all children are accounted for.
8. Once children have been accounted for:
 - a) Drill – The team leader will let the teachers and helpers know when they can safely take the children back into their classrooms. When back in the classroom, a final head count shall be taken to account for all the children.
 - b) Emergency – Teachers and helpers are to help keep the children calm and together. A team leader or teacher will release children to their respective parents/guardians with the proper security label. If a parent/guardian does not have their security label, a pastor will be needed to identify them and release the child to the parent/guardian.
9. Any problem shall be immediately brought to the attention of a team leader or pastor.

Registration Procedure

All children attending the Children's Ministry must be registered.

Regularly attending children

1. A parent/guardian will escort each child to the appropriate classroom.
2. A parent/guardian will sign the child in on the attendance sheet.
3. A teacher or helper will give the parent/guardian a nametag with the child's name, and will put a nametag sticker on the child.
4. At the end of the service a parent/guardian will sign out on the attendance sheet.
5. A teacher or helper will match the nametags. Under no circumstances are teachers or helpers to release a child without matching the correct nametags. If the parent does not have the nametag they must be directed to a team leader or the campus pastor for approval to release the child.

Visiting children

Visitors who wish to have their children participate in our Children's Ministry need to register with the Frontline Team before following the procedure described above.

Child Protection Policy

Child abuse is against the law as well as a violation of human conscience and dignity. Every state in the United States of America has laws against the abuse of children. Moreover, because the identification of child abuse in every form is vital to its prevention and its treatment, each state has enacted mandated reporting statutes. Child abuse cases must be reported. Even when there is reasonable suspicion, meaning that it is objectively reasonable for a person to entertain such a suspicion, based upon facts that are observed, a report must be made. This requirement is part of the penal code of most states.

Definition of child abuse

The state of Maryland defines child abuse as: "The physical or mental injury of a child by any parent or other person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of a child, or by any household or family member, under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of being harmed; or sexual abuse of a child, whether physical injuries are sustained or not."

- "Child" means any individual under the age of 18 years.
- "Family member" means a relative by blood, adoption, or marriage of a child.
- "Mental injury" means the observable, identifiable, and substantial impairment of a child's mental or psychological ability to function.
- "Neglect" means the leaving of a child unattended or other failure to give proper care and attention to a child by any parent or other person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of the child under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or placed at substantial risk of harm, or mental injury to the child or a substantial risk of mental injury.
- "Sexual abuse" means any act that involves sexual molestation or exploitation of a child by a parent or other person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of a child, or by any household or family member. Sexual abuse includes incest, rape, sodomy, sexual offense in any degree, or unnatural or perverted sexual practices.

Reporting procedure

All incidents (accusations or suspicions) of suspected or actual child abuse must be reported to a pastor immediately or to a team leader who will in turn report it to a pastor immediately. The pastor or designee who learns of the suspected or actual abuse shall, as soon as reasonably possible, report the allegation or suspicion to law enforcement.

The person reporting the accusation or suspicion shall write up the following:

1. The names and addresses of the child and the parent(s) or other person(s) responsible for the care of the child if known
2. Where the suspected abuse occurred
3. The age and gender of the subject(s) or child(ren) of the report
4. The nature and extent of the suspected child abuse
5. The name and relationship to the child of the person(s) responsible for causing the suspected abuse, if known to the reporter
6. The name of the person making the report and where that person can be reached in person and by phone
7. Any actions taken by the reporting source

Sex Offender Policy

Identify - *We need to identify sex offenders by doing the following:*

1. Campus pastor, Church Administrator, Frontline team leaders, and Usher team leaders should periodically access the known registered sex offender website.
2. Background checks are performed on all applicants of pastors, staff, teachers, and helpers over the age of 18.
3. The Children's Ministry security label system prevents unauthorized access to children.
4. Ushers posted during the services are to be alert to identify any potentially suspicious activity.

Communicate - *We need to communicate to each other and the sex offender when and if they attend our services.*

To each other:

1. Whoever first recognizes a known registered sex offender must immediately tell the Administrator or a pastor.
2. The Administrator will then tell the Frontline Leader, Usher team leader, and any known police officers in attendance.
3. The Usher team leader will then communicate this information to his team, so that an escort can be assigned.
4. In the event of a security crisis, any police officers in attendance will be asked for assistance.

To the known registered sex offender—we will ask the person to sign a covenant that includes:

1. We will welcome them to our church and let them know that we want them to be here on Sunday mornings, but they are not permitted to visit the campus when youth events are in session.
2. For their and our church's safety, they are not permitted in the classrooms on Sunday mornings. They are to limit themselves to the Main Meeting Room.
3. They will need an escort by one of our ushers if they wish to use the restroom at any time.
4. They will permit church leaders to tell others in the congregation about the offender's conviction if we believe it is necessary to do so.
5. They will permit church leaders to contact probation officers and others assigned to work with the offender.
6. If the offender violates any of the covenant's provisions, the offender will no longer be allowed to attend our church or access church property.

Act - *We need to act to help protect our church members and the sex offender*

1. Ushers will monitor the known registered sex offender's actions and seek to serve them in any way they can.
2. Ushers will escort the known registered sex offender to the restroom.
3. The Ushers will also ensure that the known registered sex offender doesn't enter the childcare areas.
4. If the known registered sex offender does not comply with any of these restrictions, the ushers will contact the Church Administrator or a pastor.