

Overview of the GMR Safety System

Because we desire to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults involved in our ministry programs, Grace Mills River (GMR) requires all staff members, regardless of position, and all volunteers working with or around children, youth, and vulnerable adults to complete **5 SAFETY STEPS** before employment, ministry work, or volunteer placement begins.

STEP ONE: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

GMR 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 Children's Ministry staff, Youth Ministry staff, or Pastor. Staff members and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in 'grooming' a child, youth, or vulnerable adult for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, win the child's, youth's, or vulnerable adult's trust (and the trust of his/her parent(s) or 'gatekeeper(s)'), manipulate the child, youth, or vulnerable adult into sexual activity, and keep the child, youth, or vulnerable adult from disclosing the abuse.

To equip GMR staff members and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behaviors, GMR requires all staff members and volunteers to complete Ministry Safe Sexual Abuse Awareness Training. This training will be renewed every two years of service.

STEP TWO: Criminal Background Check

GMR requires that all staff members regardless of position and all volunteers working or volunteering with children, youth, or vulnerable adults undergo a criminal background check. Depending upon position, differing levels or intensity of criminal background check may be required. Criminal background checks will be renewed every two years.

STEP THREE: Screening Process

Staff members and volunteers are required to complete the Grace Mills River Screening Process, which includes the following:

- Complete an Employment Application (employees);
- Complete a Volunteer Application (volunteers);
- Complete a face-to-face interview (employees);
- Complete a face-to-face discussion of the program (volunteers);
- Provide references to be checked (employees and volunteers).

Staff members and volunteers will be required to amend/renew their applications every three years of service.*

A volunteer must attend GMR and have been observed by other church members or current staff employees for at least six months before being eligible to serve in positions providing access to child, youth, or vulnerable adults. This observation should be documented by attendance records or reports that include: Bible studies, worship service, Sunday school, small group participation, or other scheduled GMR events. A supervisor of a ministry area may make exceptions.

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STEP FOUR: Policies & Procedures

Staff members and volunteers are required to review the policies and procedures contained in this manual. Staff members and volunteers may also be required to attend a Policy and Procedures Class, Employee Orientation, and/or Volunteer Training.

STEP FIVE: Receipt & Acknowledgment

After reviewing the policies and procedures contained in this manual and/or attending a Policies and Procedures Class, Employee Orientation, or Volunteer Training, staff members and volunteers are required to indicate that he or she has received the Policies and Procedures Manual and has read and understood the material and agrees in order to comply with policy requirements.

* Any staff member or volunteer who ceases employment or volunteering within a ministry for more than a year will be required to complete all Safety Steps upon their return to employment or volunteering within a ministry.

GMR Safety Policy

ABUSE TOLERANCE

GMR has a **ZERO TOLERANCE for abuse** in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer at GMR to act in the best interest of all children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults in every program.

In the event that staff members 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 an immediate Ministry supervisor or Pastor.

REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

GMR is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults, 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 an immediate Ministry supervisor or Pastor, and the Police Department, Child Protective Services, or other appropriate agency where appropriate.

*All adults 18 and up are mandatory reporters according to NC state law.

Hendersonville Child Protective Services: (828) 697-5572 (8:00a-4:30p) or (828) 697-4911(afterhours)

An element of the safe environment referenced above includes the fostering of a culture of reporting relevant information to church leadership. Because sexual abusers frequently 'groom' children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to 'groom' a child, youth, or vulnerable adult for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are asked to report 'grooming' behavior, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to an immediate Ministry supervisor or Pastor.

RESPONSE TO REPORT OF ABUSE

The GMR Session will take appropriate action on behalf of the church when a report of abuse occurs.

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Internal Reporting Sequence:

- Volunteers notify GMR Ministry supervisor (Youth or CM Staff)
- GMR Youth or CM Staff notify Director of Ministry
- Directory of Ministry will notify Personnel Committee & Lead Pastor as appropriate
- Personnel Committee will make a recommendation to session

Information Specific to Children's Ministry **(Children Aged 0 to ~10)**

WORKER-TO-CHILD RATIOS

GMR is committed to providing adequate supervision in all ministry programs. Accordingly, the following worker-to-child ratios will be observed:

Program Workers to Children

- Nursery, Birth to 2 years old: 2 workers to 8 children
- Preschool, 2 and 3 years old: 2 workers to 12 children
- Preschool, 4 and 5 years old: 2 workers to 18 children
- Elementary: 2 workers to 20 children

If a worker is 'out of ratio,' it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify the program supervisor or director. Supervisors will make diligent efforts to find substitute workers to immediately bring worker-to-children ratios into compliance with church policy.

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 GMR's Children's Ministry programs. Another adult who has completed the GMR Safety System process should always be present.

RELEASE OF CHILDREN

At any time that a child has been entrusted to Grace Mills River 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 Ministry 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.

Before releasing the child, the staff members or volunteers must obtain the ministry-specific release document (i.e. pick-up receipt, parent sticker, etc....) from the parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians. If a pick-up receipt is not produced, the staff members or volunteers are to direct the parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians to the appropriate location (Children's Ministry Desk) to obtain a pick-up receipt. All pick-up receipts are to be gathered and turned into the appropriate Ministry supervisor at the close of the daily program.

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In the event that staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child (even if a pick-up receipt is presented), they should immediately locate or contact their immediate Ministry supervisor or Pastor before releasing the child.

RESTROOM SUPERVISION AND ASSISTANCE GUIDELINE

Nursery/Preschool Children Age Children

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

Diapering

1. Only female 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/preschool 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 whiteboard ("Seth has 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 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 staff members or volunteers. Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in the nursery will be recorded on the whiteboard ("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. If not provided by the parent, extra clothing and diapers are available from Grace.

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. Ask other students in the class if they have to use the restroom as well or take a group

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restroom break. In the event that only one child has to go to the restroom, stand outside of the classroom door and wait for the child to return from 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 Individuals

Parents will offer instruction to staff members or volunteers to change the diapers of special needs individuals. In most circumstances, parents or legal guardians will change all special needs individuals ages 4 and older. If a special circumstance or an emergency arises (accident, parent is not on-site, etc...) that requires immediate attention and assistance, the staff member or volunteer should treat the incident according to the Restroom Supervision and Assistance Guidelines provided herein. Additionally, a parent/guardian should be informed of the incident as soon as possible.

Information Specific to Youth Ministry **(Youth Aged ~11 to 17)**

WORKER-TO-YOUTH RATIOS

GMR is committed to providing sufficient staff members and volunteer supervision in all Youth Ministry activities and programs. Accordingly, the following ratios will be observed for Youth Ministry activities and programs:

For groups up to and including 10 students, it is recommended that there be at least 2 staff members or volunteers supervising. For groups ranging between 11 to 29 students, it is recommended that there be at least 3 staff members or volunteers supervising. For groups larger than 30 students, it is recommended that there be at least 4 staff members or volunteers supervising.

If a worker is in an unmanageable ratio, it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify the responsible Youth Ministry supervisor or Pastor. The responsible Youth Ministry supervisor or Pastor will make diligent efforts to immediately bring ratios into a manageable number and in compliance with this policy.

ONE-TO-ONE INTERACTIONS WITH YOUTH

GMR recognizes that meeting the emotional needs of students may occasionally require staff members and volunteers to minister to them on an individual basis. Staff members and volunteers should observe the following guidelines when interacting with students.

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Individual Meetings

Staff members and volunteers should conduct one-to-one meetings with an individual student at a time when others are present and where interactions can be easily observed unless prior approval is obtained from the Youth Ministry Director or Pastor.

In the event a closed-door meeting must occur, the staff member/volunteer must inform another staff member and/or volunteer and ensure the door remains unlocked.

CONTACT WORK

GMR recognizes the importance of contact work in youth ministry. Contact Work is defined as interaction with students at activities, meetings, or events outside of normal GMR programming (e.g. meeting a student for lunch or dinner, attending a student's sports practice or game, etc.). The Youth Ministry Director and/or Pastor is responsible for training his/her respective staff members and volunteers regarding the parameters and expectations for appropriate contact work.

SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS

It is anticipated that certain Youth Ministry activities may occasionally require overnight sleeping arrangements for students and staff members and/or volunteers (i.e. retreats, lock ins, mission trips, ski trips, etc.). GMR recognizes this and will require various sleeping requirements and allowances. In the event an activity requires sleeping arrangements, staff members and volunteers will strictly observe the following rules:

1. Overnight sleeping arrangements must be submitted in writing and approved by the Youth Ministry Director and upon arrival.
2. A two-adult rule should be followed (at a minimum) as often as possible in all sleeping arrangements. Other arrangements must be submitted in writing and approved by the Youth Ministry Director prior to the activity. The two adult leaders present must have previously completed GMR's Safety System process.
3. As long as any students are awake, one of the leaders must also be awake and monitor students to ensure safe behavior.
4. Leaders should check with parents and use good judgment regarding PG or PG-13 movies. No R-rated movies are permitted.
5. Appropriately modest sleeping attire must be worn.
6. In the event of a sleepover on campus that involves both genders, boys and girls must sleep in separate rooms, properly supervised by leaders of the same gender.
7. Staff members and volunteers will monitor sleeping students by periodically conducting visual bed and/or room checks to ensure that sleeping students remain in designated sleeping places. During bed checks, staff members and volunteers should never physically touch a student.

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8. If a two-adult rule cannot be followed, every attempt should be made to have at least one adult staff member or volunteer in the same room as multiple students or in an adjoining room with the door between the rooms kept open, but never in the same bed as a student.
9. In the event that overnight arrangements do not include standard beds, each staff member, volunteer, and student will use single sleeping bags or blankets. In these instances, a “one-person-to-one-bag or blanket” rule will be observed.

RELEASE OF YOUTH

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

Youth Ministry staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing students in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities as follows:

6th – 12th Graders

At the conclusion of a Sunday morning program, Youth Ministry staff members or volunteers are to release all 7th through 12th grade students. It is the responsibility of the student and his/her parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians to arrange a predetermined meeting location.

At the conclusion of non-Sunday morning programs (retreats, lock-in, local events, etc...), parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians are required to retrieve their non-driving student(s) at the predetermined meeting location.

In the event that staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a student, they should immediately locate or contact their immediate Ministry supervisor, Pastor, or Ministry Safe Coordinator before releasing the student.

PARENTAL CONTACT

Parents who leave a student in the care of Grace 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 Youth Ministry programs.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

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

PHYSICAL CONTACT

GMR is committed to protecting students in its care. To this end, Grace Church has implemented a ‘physical contact policy’ that promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our Youth Ministry programs. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in the student

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program:

1. Hugging, pats on the back and other forms of appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and students are important for student'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 and a pastor.
3. Physical contact should be for the benefit of the student, 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 students or student staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted as such 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 or volunteers in the Student Ministry must foster trust at all times. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
6. Do not force any physical contact, touch or affection upon a reluctant student. A student's preference not to be touched must be respected.
7. Student staff and volunteers are responsible for protecting students 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 and a pastor.

SEXUALLY ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with students and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any student in the program. However, it is expected that from time to time youth ministry discussions and lessons may address issues related to purity, dating, sex and human sexuality. These lessons will convey the church's views on these topics.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION & SOCIAL MEDIA

As with any communication, the content of any electronic communication should be readily available to share with the Youth Director, Pastor and/or the student's parents.

Texting and Similar Electronic Communications

Texting is allowed between GMR staff members and volunteers and students. When possible, texts should be sent in group form. Prudent judgment must be used in the time texts are being sent. Accordingly, the following texting guidelines will be observed (outside of an emergency):

Ministry Not Before Not After

Middle School (6th– 8th Grade) 7 a.m./9 p.m.

High School (9th– 12th Grade) 7 a.m./12 a.m.

Social Media Sites

GMR staff members and volunteers may communicate with students through social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and/or similar sites, but all communication should be in group form and public. Private communication through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or

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similar sites (not including SnapChat), should be kept to a minimum, should be same-gender (unless in an emergency situation), and should be initiated by the student. We encourage group messaging and conversation when possible to create visibility and accountability.

The use of SnapChat and TikTok with students should be carefully administered. All communication should be in shared, public form and should be initiated by the student. **Private SnapChat and or TikTok communication between staff member(s)/volunteer(s) and student(s) is strictly prohibited.**

If a social media page is initiated (i.e. for a small group), the Youth Director/Pastor must be included.

GMR staff members and volunteers are not permitted to post inappropriate or off-color content or comment on inappropriate or off-color posts. When in doubt, choose not to post.

Frequently Asked Questions

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. What is Ministry Safe?

Ministry Safe is an abuse prevention program and system developed by Gregory Love and Kimberlee Norris. Both Love and Norris practice law in Texas and specialize in child sexual abuse litigation and prevention. The program assists churches, camps, after-school programs, and child care entities in the design and implementation of safety systems which reduce the risk of child sexual abuse. Training is done both online and live with helpful ways to think through caring and protecting children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

2. Will my information be protected?

Absolutely! All criminal background checks, awareness training results, and applications will be electronically (and securely) delivered, retrieved, and stored within GMR's Ministry Safe Control Panel. This electronic process and control panel will eliminate the need to store paper versions of employee or volunteer documents. Only designated personnel have access to this control panel, and only the Ministry Safe Coordinator and HR employees can view employee or volunteer CBCs and applications.

3. Do I have to participate in Ministry Safe?

Yes. We love to have each and every employee and volunteer working with our children, youth, and vulnerable adults, but we want to assure parents and others within (or even outside) of our church family that we believe the safety and protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults is the highest priority. As a requirement to be employed at GMR or to volunteer with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults at GMR, our Ministry Safe process is a requirement. Even if you have received Ministry Safe training in the past, we believe that you can never receive too much training. For secured, current record-keeping, all employees and volunteers working with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults will need to take the training and quiz provided by GMR.

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4. What if an individual refuses to submit to a background check?

That individual will not be allowed to serve in ministry or be employed at GMR.

5. What if an individual committed a sexual crime many years ago but has become a Christian since and/or has a long history of not engaging in that behavior again? Shouldn't we show grace to the person and let him/her participate in ministry?

GMR celebrates the transformation in the life of someone who has committed sexual abuse against children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults and prays that said person is indeed able to refrain from engaging in such behavior again. However, it is GMR's firm conviction that we are not being good stewards of the children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults entrusted to our care or to our witness to create a risk by exposing children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults to those who have a known dangerous history. No one with a history of sexual abuse may serve in ministry with children or youth.

6. There is a child/youth in my class who seems reluctant to my affection. Should I keep trying to give hugs, high fives, etc...?

Do not force physical contact, touch or affection on a reluctant child, youth, and/or vulnerable adult. A child, youth, and/or vulnerable adult's preference not to be touched must be respected.

7. How do I handle a restroom request from an Elementary student who can go to the restroom alone? Do I go with them or do I send them alone?

When possible, accompany multiple children to the restroom at the same time to eliminate any one-on-one situations. If a situation occurs where a single student must go to the restroom alone, inform the program supervisor working on the hallway of the situation so they are aware that a child is in the restroom. If you ever leave your co-teacher alone in the classroom, please make sure there are multiple students remaining in the room, that the door is left open (when possible), and that you inform the Ministry supervisor of the situation.

7. What do I do in a situation where I have an uneasy feeling about the adult presenting a pick-up receipt to obtain a child/youth from my class?

In the event you are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child or youth (even if a pick-up receipt is presented), you should immediately locate or contact the Ministry supervisor, or Pastor before releasing the child or youth.

Policies and Procedures **Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement**

Signing below signifies that I have received and read a copy of GMR's Student Ministry Policies and understand the importance of the matters set forth. I agree to follow and abide by these guidelines during my service at GMR.

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Further, I understand that the policy manual may be modified at any time and that any guidelines may be amended, revised, or eliminated at any time by GMR.

I also acknowledge that I have reviewed and agree to fulfill the duties listed in my ministry position description. While, ideally, I will serve in this ministry for the full term specified in the position description, I understand that my service is a volunteer and that I can choose to end this relationship at any time (if possible, by providing two weeks' notice to my supervisor).

I further acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this policy in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between GMR and me. If I am applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no compensation for hours that I have worked.

Finally, I understand that it is my responsibility to review new guidelines that are created and distributed as well as manual guidelines that are changed or deleted.

I HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF GRACE MILLS RIVER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES.

Electronic Signature: _____

Date: _____

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