

GRACE AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH FRISCO, TEXAS

POLICY OF GRACE AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH FOR THE PREVENTION OF ABUSE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Statement of Purpose:

Members of Grace Avenue come from a variety of experiences, backgrounds and needs. Grace Avenue is committed to providing an environment which is as safe as possible for children, youth and vulnerable adults who attend the church or any church-sponsored programs or activities, and to take the necessary precautions to protect church workers from false accusations or suspicions.

Members of Grace Avenue recognize the need to have a formal, written policy and procedures to help prevent the opportunity for the appearance of abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults. **The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers but instead are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, vulnerable adults, workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body.**

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them." Mark 10:14, 16

"Now it is required that those who have been given trust must prove faithful." I Corinthians 4:2

Definitions:

Protected Persons when used herein shall mean all preschool children, all children, all youth and all vulnerable adults participating in programs and activities of Grace Avenue United Methodist Church, Frisco.

Workers when used herein shall mean all ministers, staff, employees, scout leaders, program directors, and volunteers involved in programs and activities of Grace Avenue United Methodist Church, Frisco which are a part of any of the "Protected Persons" ministries of the church.

Vulnerable Adults when used herein shall mean all adults who require special care and supervision because of a mental or physical condition or disability.

1.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- .01 By fostering awareness of appropriate, as well as inappropriate, behavior in the presence of Protected Persons, Grace Avenue, as part of the body of Christ, will demonstrate Christian love and respect for one another.
- .02 Grace Avenue recognizes that certain Workers have exceptional talents for teaching and supporting the growth and development of Grace Avenue's Protected Persons, and wishes to encourage them to use their spiritual gifts. At the same time however, Grace Avenue has set certain criteria for those Workers who choose to serve in ministry in order to protect the well being of the Protected Persons involved in programs and activities of Grace Avenue.
- .03 It is not the intent of Grace Avenue to be judgmental, for we are all accountable to God. Grace Avenue will rely on God's wisdom in developing, implementing and carrying out God's will through this policy. Compassion and truth will be the guiding forces for any investigation, report, or follow-up action that results from the procedures as outlined in this policy.
- .04 Congregational support is critical for adherence to this policy. The limited nature of our resources, and our desire to devote as much time and effort as possible to the work of the Lord, mandates that this policy be fully understood by every member of our congregation and church family. This will enable church staff and leadership to do what is necessary to preserve the church's resources for the work of the Lord.
- .05 Pastoral counseling is outside the scope of this policy.

2.0 PROHIBITED BEHAVIOR

- .01 The following behaviors, whether consensual or not, are prohibited for all Workers while serving in a Worker position in any activity involving Protected Persons:
 - Threatening or intentionally inflicting emotional or physical injury upon a Protected Person.
 - Committing any sexual offense against a Protected Person, or engaging in any sexual contact with a Protected Person.
 - Showing, demonstrating, or revealing any photographs, art, or other depictions of sexual situations to a Protected Person.
 - Making any kind of sexual advance, or making a request for sexual favors, or engaging in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature with a Protected Person.
 - Bringing firearms or other weapons to activities involving Protected Persons.
 - Consuming or making available alcohol or drugs with or in the presence of a Protected Person.
 - Serving in a Worker position while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
 - Engaging in any illegal behavior with a Protected Person.

3.0 WORKER ENLISTMENT AND SCREENING

- .01 All Workers shall complete either the appropriate Employment Application or Volunteer Application and the form for criminal records check. This requirement applies to all Workers who are involved in any ministry of Grace Avenue which serves Protected Persons, including, but not limited to, the following programs and activities: Sunday School, nurseries, Rainbow Corner, choir, Vacation Bible Camp, summer programs, mission trips, retreats, recreational trips, service projects and scouting. All Workers shall meet all the requirements and approvals for service set out herein.
- .02 Within this policy, the term "Director" shall mean the person in charge of a particular ministry. The Director shall be responsible for coordinating applications and achieving compliance with this policy by all Workers within such Director's particular ministry. For the following areas of ministry the Director is identified as:

Rainbow Corner	Rainbow Corner Director
Children's Ministry Council	Chairperson
Children's Ministry	Director
Youth Ministry	Director
Music Ministry	Director
Boy Scouts / Girl Scouts	Director
Adult Ministry	Director
All other Staff or Work Areas	Business Administrator

- .03 All Paid Workers shall provide personal references. At least two of these references shall be checked in addition to a criminal background check.
- .04 The requirements set forth herein shall be completed within one week of any applicant being allowed to serve in any ministry with Protected Persons. A Director shall not assume that an applicant's prior behavior is proper without first verifying the information as provided in the application.
- .05 A criminal records check must be made on all first time applicants within one week. All current Workers must complete and submit the form for a criminal records check. The Director or assistant will make annual re-checks of each Worker.
- .06 The term 'criminal history' refers to any items reported on a person's criminal records, including arrests, charges, convictions, and deferred adjudications. Persons having a criminal

history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministries involving Protected Persons;

- Child or other protected person abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful;
 - Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, family violence, etc.;
 - DUI's or DWI's where the person in question may be serving as a driver;
 - Other offenses, depending on how recent, the frequency, and nature may also preclude a member from working in a Protected Person's ministry area. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Business Administrator or assistant. In all such cases, the only determining factor will be the best interests, safety and well being of the Protected Persons.
- .07 Any applicant or Worker who is arrested/charged but not convicted will be given the opportunity to explain the circumstances to the Business Administrator or assistant, who shall make the ultimate decision as to whether or not the Worker will be allowed to serve. Falsifying information on an application is cause for immediate removal from service in a Protected Person's ministry area.
- .08 All Workers approved under this policy are responsible for monitoring the actions of other Workers and ensuring that this policy is followed. Anyone who refuses to comply with this policy should be reported to the Director.

4.0 POLICY FOR WORKERS IN CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS, FIFTH GRADE AND BELOW.

4.1 Worker Conduct

- .01 Two Workers must always be present in any room where children are present and participating in a church program or activity. Under no circumstances shall a Worker be alone with a child behind a closed door. Classroom doors must never be locked while occupied by Workers and children.
- .02 Whenever possible the door to classrooms should be kept open, or, in the case of rooms with Dutch doors, the top half of the door should be kept open. It is acceptable to close the door to the classroom if there is a window to the hallway that allows observation of activities in the room.
- .03 Classes shall remain in the assigned classroom location. If there is to be a change of classroom location, the ministry Director must be notified and approve the change, and a sign must be posted on the door providing notice of any change of class location.
- .04 The Workers in each children's Sunday school classroom or other children's ministry group shall have access to a Student Information File, which shall be maintained by the Director. This file shall contain a listing of the students enrolled in the class or ministry group with references or remarks as to any Parent Instructions or special information regarding a child in such class or ministry group.

- .05 Workers shall not allow children to leave the classroom, program or activity unattended.
- .06 Workers shall always wear their assigned name tags while on duty. The name tags will signify by a style or symbol that the Worker is approved under this policy.
- .07 Two adult Workers must be in all children's classrooms even at drop-off and pick-up times. If one of the Workers has not arrived, parents should not leave their children in the room until the second Worker arrives.
- .08 With children in the nurseries, a positive identity security system will be used so that the person picking up the child can be positively matched to the child. For children, kindergarten through third grade, the parent shall complete a form which identifies who may pick up the child and where the parent(s) are likely to be found while the child is in the class. Only a parent or other person specifically designated by the parent and known to the Worker may pick up children. Parents shall provide the Director with any special information regarding a possible child custody dispute where Workers should pay particular attention to who picks up the child. Fourth and Fifth grade children may be released from Sunday School by the Workers without being picked up by a parent or other designated person if the parent provides the Workers written permission to do so. When the parents must pick up a child, the parents should do so immediately at the end of the Sunday School class and before going to other activities.
- .09 Touching to comfort or affirm a child in an age-appropriate manner is permitted. Children in first grade or older shall not sit in the lap of Workers. Workers shall not touch children in genital areas except as necessary to change a diaper or to assist a child in the bathroom as noted below.
- .10 Diaper changing should be done in the open and not behind closed doors.
- .11 For preschool classrooms which have attached bathrooms, a Worker may assist a child in the bathroom, while keeping the door open at all times. When a child is taken to a bathroom outside the classroom, a Worker must check the bathroom before the child enters to ensure it is safe. The Worker shall not accompany the child into the bathroom.

4.2 Discipline of Children

- .01 Physical discipline, such as spanking, shall never be permitted and should be reported to the Director if observed. Affirmation and encouragement is always appropriate.
- .02 The Director shall advise Workers on the best age-appropriate discipline methods.
- .03 The behavior of a child who is a constant disruption to a class, activity or program should be discussed with his or her parents and the Director. In appropriate circumstances, the parents can be asked to attend the class, activity or program to observe or control the problem behavior. A child who is a danger to him/ herself or other children may be removed immediately by the Worker and the parents shall be notified promptly.

4.3 Training for Workers

- .01 The Directors shall communicate the substance of this policy to all Workers, and all Workers must agree to comply with this policy.
- .02 Mandatory training of Workers shall be provided on a regular basis for fire and building safety, the statutory requirements for the mandatory reporting of child abuse, the identification of abuse and other safety issues. Workers who do not attend the mandatory training will not be allowed to continue to serve.

4.4 Communication with Parents

- .01 Workers should attempt to keep open lines of communication with parents.
- .02 Parents shall always be permitted to be present in a classroom or participate in non-overnight activities, although the Worker may tell the parent that his or her presence may be disruptive to the children.
- .03 Parents shall be clearly advised by the Director where to report suspected abuse or other concerns regarding a classroom situation and be assured that reports would remain confidential.
- .04 Parents shall be advised by the Director that they must pick up their children no later than ten (10) minutes after the class, activity or program is over unless special arrangements have been made with the Workers concerned.
- .05 Information concerning the sleeping accommodations for children at any overnight event shall be made available to parents by the Director. Participation in overnight activities, however, requires Worker status.
- .06 A written and signed parental consent form shall be obtained for each child who participates in any off-campus activity or program as a part of a Grace Avenue ministry. The consent form shall cover specific events. A parent or legal guardian must sign the consent form for each event. The consent form shall identify the organization/class or group involved, the place of the activity, a description of the activity, the method of transportation and the name of the Worker supervising the event, program or activity. A current medical consent form signed by a parent or guardian shall also be obtained for each child and shall be carried by the Worker supervising the event.

4.5 Staffing of the Children's Program

- .01 There shall be a minimum of two (2) Workers assigned to each activity.
- .02 There shall always be a Director or their designee on duty while classes are in session who shall make random checks of all classrooms.
- .03 The Director shall make provision for last-minute replacements of a Worker who cannot be present on a given day. If the required number of Workers cannot be obtained, the class must

be cancelled or combined with another class in order to achieve compliance with the required number of Workers in a classroom.

- .04 To ensure that there shall be sufficient substitutes available when the regular Worker cannot attend, the Children's Ministry Team, in conjunction with the Director, shall develop a program to encourage church members to undergo the mandatory screening process in order to serve as Workers.
- .05 No Workers under the age of 18 shall be permitted to serve in this program unless supervised by two other Workers, 18 years or older.
- .06 A “floating” Worker can be shared between multiple activities to comply with the two-worker rule.

5.0 POLICIES FOR WORKERS IN PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH

5.1 Physical Contact

- .01 Back rubs, massages, kissing, or similar contact are not allowed. Side-by-side hugs are suggested instead of full body contact. Touching need not be completely avoided, but is acceptable only in public. Workers must be aware of how it looks and how the person being touched may interpret the contact.

5.2 Staffing Considerations for Planned Activities

- .01 A minimum of two (2) Workers shall be present for all scheduled activities on the Youth calendar. A “floating” Worker can be shared between multiple activities to comply with the two-worker rule.
- .02 Workers must have completed high school and shall be permitted to serve in this ministry as long as they work with youth who are at least five (5) years younger than the Worker.

5.3 Meetings Between Adults and Youth

- .01 It shall not be a violation of the two-Worker policy for the Director or Counselors to conference with a youth, when the youth has requested the meeting. Any one-on-one meeting at the church involving a youth must be conducted with the door open or clearly in view of window or door. Any planned one-on-one meetings away from the church must be held in a public place. Meetings may occur only if
 - a youth director or staff member has been notified at the beginning and the end of the meeting,
 - the conference is for a relatively brief time,
 - the youth director keeps a confidential record of the meeting, its duration and the identity of the youth involved and

- such meetings are infrequent.
- .02 Separate transportation for these meetings will be used unless permission is given to the adult by the youth's parent or guardian
 - .03 At no time shall a youth Worker pursue a dating relationship with a student.

5.4 Driving Rules

- .01 Only Workers may drive. All drivers must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance.
- .02 When one vehicle is used for an event, the two-Worker rule still applies unless parental permission is obtained prior to the trip. When several vehicles are used for an event, keeping the other vehicles in sight is an acceptable substitute for the two-Worker rule.
- .03 The number of persons per vehicle must not exceed the number of seatbelts, and all occupants must wear seatbelts. Buses not equipped with seatbelts are exempt.

5.5 Overnight and Trip Rules

- .01 Annual Permission Slips and notarized Consent for Medical Treatment forms must be on file prior to any overnight trip. New forms will be completed for each youth at the beginning of each school year. The two-Worker rule must be followed throughout the trip, with any exceptions clearly stated and approved in advance by the parent or guardian.
- .02. The total number of Workers on each trip will be adjusted according to the requirements of the planned activities.

5.6 Discipline of Youth

- .01 Physical discipline shall never be used.
- .02 The Director shall advise Workers on the best age-appropriate discipline methods.
- .03 The behavior of a child who is a constant disruption to a class, activity or program should be dealt with by
 - The worker in charge,
 - The youth director, and
 - The parents who will be contacted about the specific situation.
- .04 A youth who is danger to himself or herself or others may be removed by the Worker in charge. The Youth Minister and parents will be notified promptly.

5.7 Training for Workers

- .01 The Directors shall communicate the substance of this policy to all Workers, and all Workers must agree to comply with this policy.
- .02 Mandatory training of Workers shall be provided on a regular basis for fire and building safety, the statutory requirements for the mandatory reporting of child abuse, the identification of abuse and other safety issues. Workers who do not attend the mandatory training will not be allowed to continue to serve.

6.0 POLICIES FOR WORKERS IN PROGRAMS FOR VULNERABLE ADULTS

It must be recognized that all adult programs at Grace Avenue United Methodist Church may include Vulnerable Adults and that these persons may not be easily recognizable as vulnerable. Therefore, workers should exercise the following principles whenever working with adult programs.

6.1 Physical Contact

- .01 Back rubs, massages, kissing, or similar contact between Workers and Vulnerable Adults are not allowed. Side-by-side hugs are suggested instead of full body contact. Touching need not be completely avoided, but is acceptable only in public. Workers must be aware of how it looks and how the person being touched may interpret the contact.

6.2 Numbers of Workers

- .01 For adult programs, the two-worker policy shall not be in effect. However, Workers should avoid situations in which they are alone with program participants, except as noted in section 6.3 below.

6.3 Meetings between Workers and Vulnerable Adults

- .01 To avoid the appearance of impropriety and to help ensure the safety of Vulnerable Adults, the following standards should be observed when any adult requests a personal, one-on-one meeting with a Worker:
 - a. Whenever possible, the door to the room should not be completely closed, or, in the case of rooms with Dutch doors, the top half of the door should be kept open.
 - b. The Worker should inform the Director, another Worker or Church staff member, in advance, of a planned meeting, although, for confidentiality, the name of the Vulnerable Adult need not be divulged.
 - c. In cases where it is known that the adult is a Vulnerable Adult, the Worker should suggest the Vulnerable Adult bring another person with them to the meeting, although the

companion may wait outside the room.

d. In selecting a room for the meeting, Workers should be mindful of any physical handicaps of the Vulnerable Adult and choose a site that allows for the comfort and access of that person.

6.4. Driving Rules

.01 Only leaders or other qualified individuals may drive. All drivers must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance. Workers shall ensure there are at least two program participants in the vehicle with the driver. The total number of persons per vehicle, however, must not exceed the number of seatbelts, and all occupants must wear seatbelts. Buses not equipped with seatbelts are exempt.

6.5 Overnight and Trip Rules

.01 Written Permission and Medical Consent forms must be completed prior to the trip. As with all adult programs and transportation arrangements, there shall be at least two program participants present with Workers.

7.0 REPORTING AND INVESTIGATIONS

7.1 Reporting Requirements

.01 All Workers shall immediately report and document any incident of abuse or any violation of this policy. Any person making and/or receiving such a report shall keep the information strictly confidential.

7.2 Incident of Abuse Defined

.01 An "incident of abuse" means any occurrence in which:

- There is a violation of an individual's human and civil rights by any other person or persons. Consent is crucial in determining whether a particular act, relationship or situation is abusive of the persons concerned. It is necessary to determine whether the Protected Person could and did give informed consent to whatever took place. Consent is hereby defined as a voluntary, uncoerced decision, made by a sufficiently competent or autonomous person on the basis of adequate information and deliberation, to accept rather than reject a proposed course of action that will affect the Protected Person.
- Any person has intentionally threatened or inflicted emotional or physical injury upon a Protected Person, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
- Any person commits or allows any sexual offense to be committed against a Protected Person.
- A Protected Person makes any kind of sexual advance, or makes a request for sexual favors,

or engages in sexually motivated physical contact, or engages in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.

7.3 Reporting Procedure

- .01 The person reporting an incident of abuse shall contact the Director, as previously defined in Section 3.0.02, a minister of the church, or the Business Administrator.
- .02 All situations shall be handled confidentially with due respect for the privacy of the alleged victim and all others involved in the incident. Before, during and after the making of a report of abuse, the incident and report should be disclosed only to and discussed only with those defined by this policy as having a need to know.
- .03 The person making a report of abuse shall inform the Director, minister or Business Administrator of all facts known with respect to the incident of abuse. Upon receiving a report of an incident of abuse, the Director, minister, or Business Administrator, together with the person making the report of abuse shall complete the written Report of Suspected Incident of Child or Vulnerable Adult Abuse. However, in all cases where the alleged abuser is the person to whom a report should be made, he or she shall be considered absent for purposes of this reporting procedure, and the report shall be made to that Director's immediate supervisor, a minister or the Business Administrator.
- .04 In all cases where any Worker has reasonable cause to believe that a Protected Person participating in or involved in Grace Avenue ministries may be abused, neglected, or exploited, the Worker is required by state law to make a report to the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (PRS) Statewide Intake at 1-800-252-5400. Prior to making such a report, the Worker should follow the internal reporting procedure outlined above. If the Worker is in doubt regarding whether a report should be made, he or she should consult with the ministry, Director, a minister of Grace Avenue, or the Business Administrator. The persons reporting the incident of abuse and the Director, minister, or Business Administrator shall then, together, contact PRS.
- .05 It is noted that Grace Avenue United Methodist Church adheres to the Local United Methodist Church Policy Statement on Misconduct of a Sexual Nature (the "Policy Statement"). That policy contains procedures and/or guidelines for the reporting of misconduct of a sexual nature. Regarding matters to which the Policy Statement would apply, and to the extent that the Policy Statement might conflict with the policies and procedures in this section, the provisions of the Policy Statement shall control, and shall supersede this section.

7.4 Responding to the Report

- .01 After contacting Protective and Regulatory Services (PRS), the Director, minister, or the Business Administrator should immediately contact legal counsel, who shall within 72 hours of the report conduct an investigation with their assistance and determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the abuse may have occurred.
- .02 Take all reasonable steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer has no contact with the alleged victim pending the investigation.

7.5 Investigation

.01 Upon notification of a reported incident of abuse within the ministries of Grace Avenue, the attorney shall conduct an investigation under the supervision of a “Supervising Committee,” which shall consist of the Senior Minister, Business Administrator and the Director of the Ministry area. The “Supervising Committee” shall be established once an incident has been reported.

.02 The Supervising Committee shall ensure:

- That the investigation is kept strictly confidential and that all evidentiary privileges are maintained.
- That the investigation is thoroughly documented and that a confidential file is maintained.
- That all witnesses with information concerning the alleged abuse are contacted and interviewed.
- That the interests of the alleged victim and alleged wrongdoer are protected during the investigative phase.
- That the attorney, within 72 hours of the report and in consultation with the Supervising Committee, reaches a conclusion whether there is reasonable cause to believe abuse may have occurred.

7.6 Finding of No Abuse

.01 If the attorney finds that there is not reasonable cause to believe the alleged abuse may have occurred, the attorney shall provide a written report to the appropriate committee of Grace Avenue

.02 The written report shall:

- Preserve the identity, confidentiality and privacy of the alleged victim, the alleged wrongdoer, and all witnesses identified and contacted.
- Summarize the allegations and the steps taken to investigate them.
- Set forth the conclusion and the reasons supporting the conclusion.
- Set forth the temporary actions taken by the Supervising Committee and also set forth a recommendation of additional action to be taken by the appropriate committee in response to the reported incident of abuse.

7.7 Finding of Abuse

.01 If the attorney finds that there is reasonable cause to believe abuse may have occurred, the attorney shall provide a written report to the appropriate Committee of Grace Avenue and shall meet to discuss the report.

.02 The written report shall:

- Preserve the identity, confidentiality and privacy of the alleged victim, the alleged wrongdoer, and all witnesses identified and contacted.
- Set forth the allegations and the steps taken to investigate the allegations.
- Set forth the facts discovered during the investigation.
- Set forth the conclusion reached as a result of the investigation and the reasons supporting the conclusion.
- Set forth the temporary actions taken by the Supervising Committee and additional actions, if any, to be taken by the appropriate committee of the church.

.03 In addition, the Senior Minister shall ensure that the following actions are taken:

- Send notice of a claim or potential claim to Grace Avenue's general liability insurance carrier and, if appropriate, the sexual misconduct liability insurance carrier, as soon as possible but in no event later than thirty (30) days after receiving the report of the incident or such shorter period of time as set forth in any applicable policy of insurance. In addition, provide the carrier with all other information and cooperate with such carrier as may be required.
- Cause the crisis response plan to be implemented.
- Report the incident to the District Superintendent and the Bishop.
- Conduct all further investigations as directed by the appropriate committee of Grace Avenue.

.04 In addition, the Supervisory Committee shall determine the need for counseling for the alleged victim, the alleged abuser, and others who may be aware of the incident. Where appropriate the church should provide such counseling directly or arrange for it through other sources.

8.0 CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN

8.1 General Guidelines

.01 The Supervising Committee shall select a spokesperson to handle dissemination of information to staff, media and congregation. In his or her absence, the Senior Minister will be the spokesperson.

- .02 The Supervising Committee shall have ready for release, a clear position statement outlining Grace Avenue's policy regarding any abuse of Protected Persons and the established safeguards.
- .03 The Supervising Committee shall select an attorney who will be present with the spokesperson while answering any investigative questions from the police or social service agencies.
- .04 The Church spokesperson shall use text or a prepared public statement to answer questions from the news media and /or inform the congregation. At all times, the identity, privacy and confidentiality of all those involved must be strictly maintained to the extent possible.
- .05 The Church spokesperson should keep in mind that information given to or obtained by news media may have a bearing on the church's liability, so careful judgment should be exercised.
- .06 The Church spokesperson should anticipate media questions.
- .07 If the Church spokesperson does not know the answer to a question, he/she should simply state, "I don't know, but I'll do my best to find out the information for you."