

SAFE
Environment
POLICY

GOOD NEWS

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to enable our church to provide an environment that is safe, healthy, and conducive to learning and forming positive relationships. Protecting minors (those under the age of 18 years of age) and disabled adults is of utmost importance in all areas of ministry. This policy governs the conduct of all paid and volunteer staff of Good News Church.

DEFINITIONS

AUTHORITY FIGURE is an adult who is the primary leader of any children, youth, or at-risk or vulnerable adult activity and such person is required to be 21 years of age or older.

ASSISTANT is a person who gives help to and is directed by an authority figure in the course of any youth, children, or at-risk or vulnerable adult activity; including, but not limited to, volunteers, interns, camp counselors, and vacation bible school helpers. For on campus activities, an assistant must be no younger than high school age to work with children younger than 6th grade, and no younger than college age to work with youth.

ADULTS are all persons who have attained the age of majority (18 years in Florida).

FLOATER is an adult who acts as an assistant to an authority figure to monitor covered activities or events in order to comply with the two adult rule when achieving such compliance by use of two non-related adults is unfeasible.

CHILDREN are all persons from infants through fourth grade.

YOUTH are all persons from fifth grade through twelfth grade.

AT RISK OR VULNERABLE ADULTS are adults with physical, mental, and/or developmental impairment or disability.

RESPONSIBILITY

All staff, paid or volunteer, shall be responsible for implementing this policy.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

SCREENING AND SELECTION

A process for selecting and screening workers, as described below, shall be followed. This process is for both volunteer and paid staff. As part of the selection process, applicants must:

- Submit an application and personal references; these references shall not be family members, relatives, pastors of this church, or ministry leaders
- Participate in an interview process with the Ministry Leader
- Consent to a National Criminal Background Check
- Participate in a Safe Environment Training

Any conviction involving abuse of or harm toward children, youth, or vulnerable adults will disqualify the applicant from participating in ministries with children, youth, or at risk or vulnerable adults. All other convictions will be reviewed by the Executive Pastor and Staff Parish Committee in order to ensure the safety of all involved.

All documentation collected as part of the application and screening process shall be maintained in a permanent secure file accessible only to the Executive Pastor and Executive Ministry Assistant.

YOUTH HELPERS

Youth helpers are considered children or youth under the age of 18 who assist with ministries (i.e. Vacation Bible School).

Youth helpers shall follow all of the same guidelines as adult leaders.

Youth helpers shall never be alone with children without an adult present.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

TRAINING

All volunteer leaders shall be trained once every three years in the practices of Safe Environment; all staff shall be trained annually. All leaders MUST go through training before serving with children, youth or at risk or vulnerable adults. A record of attendees shall be kept on file for a minimum of five years.

The church community shall be informed of the Safe Environment policy and how the church is working to prevent abuse. The church community shall also be notified in advance of Safe Environment training policies.

Training may be offered to the following:

- Any leader of church-sponsored ministry with children, youth or vulnerable adults
- Any leader of outside groups that utilize the church facilities for activities with children, youth or vulnerable adults
- Any person in the community who would like to learn more about Safe Environment and its ministry of abuse prevention

The training shall include information, explanation and discussion of the following:

- Local church policy and operational procedures
- Appropriate boundary guidelines
- Appropriate playground/recreational supervision
- Behaviors or other indicators which may signal concerns or abuse
- Requirements of Florida law for reporting incidents of abuse
- Procedures for reporting observed or suspected incidents of abuse

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

GENERAL SUPERVISION GUIDELINES

TWO ADULT RULE: A minimum of two adults who are not related to each other should be utilized in all programming with children, youth, and at risk or vulnerable adults. A married person cannot be compelled to testify against their spouse. Therefore, when a married couple volunteers with children or youth, there must always be another adult present. When it is impossible to appropriately staff rooms, there should be an additional adult serving as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas. For on campus activities, when it is impossible to have two adults, an assistant can be a youth if age requirements are followed. (i.e. no younger than high school age to serve with children under sixth grade and no younger than college age to serve with sixth grade and above).

This rule protects minors and disabled adults by reducing the risk of abuse, and protects workers by reducing the risk of false accusations. The two-adult rule applies to all official church functions, including but not limited to services, classes, field trips, parties, etc.

ADEQUATE STAFF: All official church functions that involve children, youth and at risk or vulnerable adults will be staffed adequately enough to ensure safe activities and compliance with this policy. All paid and volunteer personnel employed or serving with children in the 6th grade or below must be at least 21 years of age or in high school unless they additional workers over and above the minimum number of workers required and serving alongside a parent . Volunteers and paid staff serving with students in the 7th-12th grade or with disabled adults must be at least 21 years of age or in college unless they are additional workers over and above the minimum number of workers required.

OPEN DOOR POLICY: Classrooms, child-care and program rooms used for children, youth, and at risk or vulnerable adults should be open to visitation at any time by staff, parents, caregivers, or other volunteers at any time without prior notice.

SIGN-IN AND SIGN-OUT PROCEDURES: Sign-in and sign-out procedures should be in place for all ministries for and with children and youth.

RELEASING CHILDREN: Children 4th grade and younger are not released on their own. They must be picked up by a parent or sibling over age 16.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

GENERAL SUPERVISION GUIDELINES CONTINUED

RESTROOM GUIDELINES: An adult or youth employee or volunteer will not enter a restroom alone with a child. They will not enter a restroom stall with a child. Children who are capable of going to the restroom by themselves should be allowed to do so, but workers will adequately monitor the children's travel to and from the restroom. Workers may provide assistance in unfastening and fastening young children's clothing, but such assistance will not take place inside a restroom stall.

ADMINISTRATION OF MEDICINE PROHIBITED: Workers will not administer any medication of any kind to any child. Medication may be administered only by a child's parent/guardian. In special cases, such as field trips, youth trips, or epi-pen situations, exceptions will be made.

OVERNIGHT ACTIVITIES/TRIPS/SPECIAL SETTINGS

OVERNIGHT/OUT OF TOWN DAY TRIPS: The following guidelines must be followed for all out of town or overnight trips or activities involving children or youth:

- A liability waiver must be turned in for every young person before the trip
- Two non-related adults must always be present to protect both children and adults by providing a check on behavior and as witnesses in the event of accusations
- The adults staying with the young people must always be the same gender as the young people
- Select a hotel with rooms opening to an interior closed hallway when possible
- If two non-related adults cannot be assigned to a room housing youth, the youth should be housed separately from the adults. If adjoining rooms are available, a single adult in each adjoining room is acceptable provided the doors remain open
- Adults must not be alone in a lodging room with a young person at any time and must not share a bed with a young person unless he/she is an immediate family member or guardian of such young person and of the same gender
- Where adults need to be assigned to separate rooms, it is recommended that one adult room be located between every two youth rooms on the hall if possible.
- Adults should develop a rotating schedule allowing for the hallways to be monitored throughout the night
- If room checks are needed, they should involve two adults of the same gender as the room residents

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

OVERNIGHT ACTIVITIES/TRIPS/SPECIAL SETTINGS CONTINUED

INTERPERSONAL BOUNDARIES: Adult workers with children and youth must be attentive to:

- Appropriate dress code
- Appropriate use of language
- Appropriate demonstration of affection and encouragement (i.e. an adult leader should never initiate a hug and should always be the one to end the hug)

MENTORING: Adult workers mentoring children and youth must follow the guidelines listed below:

- The adult must have gone through a background check, basic screening, and training on the Safe Environment policy for Good News
- Establish clear written guidelines for settings, boundaries, and the environment where the mentoring will occur
- Outings should always be in public places with routes and time-frames agreed upon in advance. If possible, outings with several mentors and young people are preferred
- One-to-one mentoring should be conducted in a group setting such as one large room

COUNSELING:

As we are not licensed counselors, we should encourage our children, youth, and at-risk or disabled adults to seek counseling from a professional licensed counselor.

HOME VISITATION:

- When visiting a young person in their home, the two non-related adult rule still applies
- If a young person drops by the home of an adult volunteer or staff person, the visit should be conducted in the front yard or moved to a public venue
- Educating young people of these requirements before they visit is most beneficial

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is a covered activity whenever such transportation is provided in a church-owned or leased vehicle or when a church staff member is the driver of or present in any vehicle used for such transportation. This provision shall not apply to multi-vehicle caravanning transportation and require two adults to occupy each of the private vehicles in a caravan.

Whenever possible church vehicles and charters should be utilized instead of private vehicles. If it is absolutely necessary to use private vehicles the following criteria must be met:

- All drivers should be screened in the same manner as other leadership for an event
- When private vehicles are used to transport young people for programmed church-related events, leaders should ensure that appropriate insurance is being maintained by both the church and the private driver
- All drivers must be 21 years of age or older
- When possible, it is recommended that two adults be placed in each vehicle or the vehicles be teamed in minimum groups of two that stay together at all times
- No young person other than the driver's own child should sit in the front seat. No lone adult should sit in other seat rows also occupied by a young person other than their own child

DIGITAL SAFETY

- Volunteers and employees should maintain Christian principles when using social networking sites, especially when referencing church events.
- When posting pictures and videos, no names are to be posted for those under 18 years of age. Pictures and videos should only be posted for those with parental media consent.
- Ministry leaders involved with children, youth, or at risk or vulnerable adults shall never initiate a "friend request" on personal accounts.
- Private text messaging involving children or youth shall be shifted to a group text that shall include two authority figures.
- No messages shall take place on a platform where messages automatically disappear.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

BULLYING PREVENTION

Bullying is a pattern of behavior in which a person is "exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons." Negative action is when a person intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another person, through physical contact, through written, verbal, or electronic expression or in other ways. The intent is to make fun of, embarrass, or exclude others.

The following are examples of bullying behaviors:

- Using mean and hurtful nicknames
- Deliberately excluding someone from a group of friends
- Attempting or threatening to inflict injury on another person
- Spreading false rumors
- Sending mean notes, texts, etc
- Using any type of social media to make fun of, embarrass, or exclude others

GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

1. Good News Church has a zero-tolerance policy toward bullying. This policy applies not only to people who directly engage in an act of bullying, but also to persons who, by their indirect behavior, condone or support another person's act of bullying.
2. No employed staff or volunteer shall permit, condone, or tolerate bullying. They must be prepared to intervene quickly and decidedly in bullying situations and in situations where there is only a suspicion that bullying is taking place.
3. Children, youth, parents, staff and volunteers are expected to immediately report incidents of bullying to a supervising adult or the Ministry Leader.
4. All complaints of bullying will be investigated and appropriate action taken.
5. This policy applies to all persons who are on church grounds and all persons who are participating in a church sponsored off-campus trip or event.

CHURCH ACTION: Upon receipt of a report of bullying, the appropriate church staff shall:

1. Talk with any volunteers who were present to determine the validity of the complaint.
2. Contact parents of both parties to inform them of the alleged incident.
3. Complete Bullying Report Form.
4. Work together with parents to counsel all involved parties on correcting behavior and making amends.
5. If behavior cannot be corrected, the child/student will be suspended from programming for two weeks unless the parent attends with the child/student.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

ACCIDENTS

If an accident occurs with a child, youth, or at risk or vulnerable adult, the following actions should be taken:

- All accidents should be reported to parents or caregivers
- In the event that a child has a head trauma of any degree, a parent will be notified
- If additional medical attention is deemed necessary, the Executive Pastor should also be notified whether the church staff or parents/caregivers seek the additional aid
- Accidents occurring on church property or in conjunction with church activities involving a child, youth or vulnerable adult must be documented on the Good News Accident & Incident Form
- Accident & Incident Reports should be kept on file with the Executive Pastor. If additional medical attention was deemed necessary, a copy of the report should be given to the Finance Administrator.

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

Here at Good News, we believe in partnering with parents in order to raise up the next generation of believers. It is our hope that our Ministry Leaders and Crew Leaders become invested in the lives of the children and youth that call Good News home. If at any point, something is shared with a Crew Leader or Ministry Leader that could impact the physical, mental, or emotional safety and health of the child or student, the Crew Leader or Ministry Leader has the right to share the information with the parent/caregiver.

We follow the guiding principle: If this was my child, would I want to know?

The following steps will be followed in the case that something is shared in confidentiality that needs to be shared with parents:

1. The Crew Leader will share the information with the Ministry Leader.
2. The Crew Leader and Ministry Leader will meet with the child/student and discuss the need to bring the parents in.
3. Depending on age of the child, the leaders will present the following options:
 - a. The child/student will share the information with the parents themselves.
 - b. The Crew Leader and Ministry Leader will go with the child/student to share the information with the parents.
 - c. The Crew Leader and Ministry Leader will share the information with the parents.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

TYPES OF ABUSE

Abuse is categorized in five primary forms: physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and ritual abuse.

1. **Physical Abuse** is when a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child. Examples may include violent battery with a weapon (knife, belt, strap, etc), burning, shaking, kicking, choking, fracturing bones, and other non-accidental injuries to a person.
2. **Emotional Abuse** is when a person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the child of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved but undeserving of love and care. Children exposed to emotional abuse may be locked in a closet, deprived of parental affection, constantly told they are bad or stupid, or allowed to abuse alcohol or drugs.
3. **Neglect Abuse** is when a person endangers a child, teenager, or disabled adult's health, safety, or welfare through negligence. Neglect may include withholding food, clothing, medical care, education, and even affection and affirmation of a child's self-worth.
4. **Sexual Abuse** is when sexual conduct between a child, teenager, or disabled adult and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth) occurs. The victim is never truly capable of consenting to or resisting such contact and/or such sexual acts. Often, the child is physically and psychologically dependent upon the perpetrator of the abuse. Example of sexual abuse may include fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to child pornography or prostitution.
5. **Ritual Abuse** is when physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly and intentionally by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare. The abuser may appeal to some higher authority or power to justify the abuse. The abuse may include cruel treatment of animals or repeated threats of harm to the victim, family members, or animals.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Children are a gift from the Lord and are invited to fully participate in the life of the church. Children need to feel welcomed, loved, and protected. God calls us to create communities of faith where children, youth, and adults increase in wisdom and knowledge in a safe and secure environment.

Studies have estimated that 1 out of 3 girls are sexually abused before the age of 18. Also, studies indicate 1 out of 7 boys have been sexually abused before the age of 18. How does abuse happen? Child sexual abuse happens when a person exerts his or her power over a child in ways that harm and/or exploit the child. In other words, the abuser is powerful; the child is vulnerable. There may be several sources from which the abuser gains power over the child: size, position, knowledge, money, etc. It is imperative for our church to adopt and implement a safe environment policy and apply this policy in all areas of ministry.

Because we care about our children, teenagers, and disabled adults, we require that all staff and volunteers complete the following:

- A formal application process
- A formal face to face interview
- Two character references and the church will contact previous churches, organizations, and prior employers
- Regular attendance in church

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING ABUSE

Good News Church will respond to all alleged or suspected incidences of child/youth abuse in an effort to protect the child/youth and any individuals involved in the incident. It is not the policy of the church to prove whether the alleged suspected abuse has or has not occurred, as this is this responsibility of the proper legal authorities.

Upon suspecting or learning of an allegation of abuse during church related activities...

Should an adult in charge suspect abuse, or a child, youth or vulnerable adult report abuse by any member of the church staff, volunteer, or employed staff, or by any person present at a church sponsored meeting or activity, the following procedures shall apply for reporting the alleged abuse:

1. The situation should be reported immediately to the staff member who is in charge of the event or activity.
2. The adult in charge (Employed Staff or Volunteer) shall document the incident in writing. Documentation shall be signed and dated.
3. The staff member in charge of the event or activity will immediately suspend and remove the individual from the duties involving minors and/or disabled adults pending external and internal investigation.
4. The Executive Pastor or Senior Pastor shall be notified immediately. If a pastor is the accused party, notify the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
5. The Executive Pastor and staff member will decide who will inform the parents of the allegations and respond to questions and concerns.
6. The staff person will inform appropriate legal or state authorities by telephone immediately. A written report will be created concerning the incident and a copy placed on file in the church office.
7. All such matters will be dealt with in the strictest confidence. Any person reporting alleged abuse will refrain from any discussion about the alleged incident with anyone other than the authorities, key staff, and the Chair of Staff Parish Committees.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING ABUSE CONTINUED

Upon suspecting or learning of an allegation of abuse outside of church related activities...

If an adult in a supervisory position suspects a case of abuse, or a child, youth or vulnerable adult reports abuse occurring away from church-sponsored functions, the following procedures shall apply:

1. The adult shall document the incident in writing. Documentation shall be signed and dated.
2. The Senior Pastor and/or Executive Pastor shall be notified immediately.
3. The Senior Pastor and/or Executive Pastor and staff person over the child's ministry area shall notify DCF or law enforcement immediately.

DEALING WITH PERSONS ACCUSED OF ABUSE

Employed Staff

Should a Good News employee be accused of physically or sexually abusing a child or vulnerable adult, whether or not in connection with a church activity, that employee shall immediately be reassigned to a position that does not have any supervisory authority over children, youth or vulnerable adults, and shall not return to a supervisory position until such a time as the Lead Pastor, Executive Pastor, and Chair of the SPRC deem appropriate.

Pending investigation, Good News reserves the right to reassign or suspend the employee, with or without pay and benefits, depending on the circumstances.

Volunteers

Should a Good News volunteer be accused of physical or sexual abuse, whether or not in connection with a church activity, that volunteer shall immediately be suspended from working on any GN activities that involve children, youth or vulnerable adults. The volunteer shall not be allowed to work on any GN activities involving any of these at risk groups until such a time as the Lead Pastor/Executive Pastor and Staff Parish Committee deem appropriate.