

Safe Church Policies and Guidelines for Minors

Vineyard Church Glendora

General Purpose Statement

Vineyard Church Glendora seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of Vineyard Church Glendora from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children. The term “volunteer” means anyone involved in church activities involving minors, in counseling of minors, or in one-on-one mentoring of minors.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) Six Month Rule

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with Vineyard Church Glendora for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children. Exceptions will only be given for college students as cleared by the ministry Directors. College students must still adhere to all other screening procedures.

b) Written Application

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the church.

c) Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

d) Reference Checks

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should be of an

institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at church.

e) Church Affiliation

It is expected that all volunteers and workers consider Vineyard Church Glendora their church home and are actively engaged with the church community in a variety of ways

f) Hiring Out

From time to time it will be deemed necessary to hire out help for various church functions. In this event, hired help will be come approved Vineyard Church Glendora leadership and supervised by a Vineyard Kids staff member at all times. Hired help will never be left alone or unattended with a minor.

g) Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and “volunteers” as defined above.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Director of Vineyard Kids and Elder Board on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children.

Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the church.

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.

- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Volunteers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Director of Vineyard Kids for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. The organization will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 14.
- Must be screened as specified above.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

Check-in/Check-out Procedure

For children below fifth grade, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be signed in by a parent or guardian, who will receive an I.D. sticker for the child similar to a claim check. The parent or guardian must present the I.D. sticker in order to sign out the child from our care. In the event that a parent or guardian is unable to present the I.D. sticker the Director of Vineyard Kids will be contacted. The Director will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian after discussing the surrounding circumstances with the parent or guardian.

Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at Vineyard Church Glendora. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours;
- Green or yellow runny nose;
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of Vineyard Church Glendora not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions).

Parents of such children should address their situation with the Director of Vineyard Kids to develop a plan of action.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of Vineyard Church Glendora not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the Director of Vineyard Kids ministry if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

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

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

Zero Tolerance

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

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

Physical Contact

Respect, safety, and appropriate boundaries are the guiding principles for physical contact between ministry leaders and children. The guidelines below are intended to avoid contact that is or may appear threatening or inappropriate. These guidelines apply to both to the manner in which ministry leaders and volunteers interact with minors as well as the manner in which children interact with other children.

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

- Brief hugs or side hugs

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

The following forms of affection are considered inappropriate with children and youth in ministry.

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

Not only must adults have safe behavior with minors, but children must equally be safe for one another. Any child who exhibits unsafe behavior that is harmful to them or themselves will be removed immediately from children's ministry until cleared by the Director of Vineyard Kids. The Director of Vineyard Kids will work with parents to determine when the child is ready to return to ministry activities. In some cases, their return may include a plan of supervision and accountability that must be adhered to and agreed upon by both parents and child. Examples of inappropriate behavior between children are:

- Touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas
- Showing their own bottoms, chests, or genital areas to other children
- Kissing
- Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development
- Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touch of underwear whether or not it is covered by other clothing
- Coercing or encouraging other children to touch them in any inappropriate manner (kissing, genitals, etc.)
- Using any sexual language with other children or “teaching” children about sexuality.
- Physically or verbally harming or threatening to harm someone.*
- Physically or verbally harming or threatening to harm themselves.*
- Any bullying behavior that causes a child to feel unsafe or unwelcome from participating in ministry events.

***Threats of Violence Against Others or to Harm Self**

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

Restroom Guidelines

Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the outside bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For children over the age of five, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take girls. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Training

Vineyard Church Glendora will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.