



**BEFREE  
CHURCH**

# **Policies & Procedures**

*for Children's Ministries*



## **BE Free Church Children's Ministries**

Dear Children's Volunteer or Staff Member,

Welcome to BE Free Church Children's Ministry!

At BE Free Church, we take our responsibility to care for children and youth seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which children can grow in relationship with Jesus.

The pages of this handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guidelines for BE Free Church volunteers and staff members. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for children. The following procedures have been adopted and will be strictly enforced.

After you have carefully read this policy manual, please sign and return the agreement form located on the last page. If you have questions, please contact your ministry leader.

Sincerely,

BE Free Church Leadership

# **BE Free Church Policies & Procedures for Children's Ministries**

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## **Overview of the BE Free Church Safety System**

BE Free Church requires all staff members and volunteers working with children or students (and other vulnerable populations) to complete **FOUR SAFETY STEPS** before ministry work or volunteer placements begin.

### **SCREENING PROCESS**

Staff members and volunteers are required to complete the BE Free Church Screening Process, which requires a staff member or volunteer to:

- complete an Employee Application (employees only)
- complete the Volunteer Application (employees and volunteers)
- complete a face-to-face interview (employees and volunteers)
- provide references to be checked (employees and volunteers)

\*A volunteer must regularly attend BE Free Church for one year before being considered to serve in volunteer positions providing access to children, students or vulnerable populations. Exceptions of the one-year attendance requirement may be made with approval of ministry staff and church leadership. All volunteers in Children's Ministries must be a minimum age of 13 or entering 7th grade.

### **SEXUAL ABUSE AWARENESS TRAINING**

BE Free Church policies and procedures require that staff members and volunteers avoid abusive behavior of any kind. Staff in children ministries and volunteers are required to report any policy violations. Timely documentation of incidents will be submitted to the BE Free Church Safety Committee for monitoring and oversight. Staff in children ministries and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in 'grooming' a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, win the child's trust (and the trust of the child's parent or 'gatekeeper'), manipulate the child into sexual activity and keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

To equip BE Free Church and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, BE Free Church requires all staff in children ministries and volunteers to complete MinistrySafe's Sexual Abuse Awareness Training (live or online at [www.MinistrySafe.com](http://www.MinistrySafe.com)). This training will be renewed every two years.

### **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Staff in children ministries and volunteers are required to review the policies contained in this manual and sign the last page indicating that he or she has read and understood the material, and agrees to comply with policy requirements. The last page indicated will be returned for record to the appropriate Ministry Leader.

### **CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK**

BE Free Church requires that all staff members and volunteers working or volunteering in children's or student activities or programming undergo a criminal background check. Depending upon position, differing levels or intensity of background check may be required. Any reports on the Criminal Background check will warrant further investigation. Individuals who have committed sexually-oriented or sex-related crimes may not serve in any area providing services to children or minors. In addition, certain other past criminal acts *may* preclude an applicant from serving minors. Criminal Background Checks will be routinely updated for all children-volunteers and workers. Any future incidents with law enforcement or

other pertinent services (driving or medical) should be brought to the Ministry Leader for communication as long as involved in active volunteering.

## **Child Safety Policy**

### **ABUSE - ZERO TOLERANCE**

BE Free Church has a **zero tolerance for any form of abuse** in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer at BE Free Church to act in the best interest of all children in every program.

In the event that staff 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 their Ministry Area Leader and member of the pastoral staff.

### **ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES**

BE Free Church staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff members or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of BE Free Children Church policies. Failure to enforce and violations of these BE Free Children policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, corrective and retraining action, or reassignment from any position directly or indirectly within Children's and Youth Ministries – for both volunteers and staff members. All incidents will be single-documented, archived, and signed by all appropriate parties regardless of perceived intensity within a timely manner to be reviewed.

## **Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse**

### **REPORTING VIOLATION OF POLICY**

In order to maintain a safe environment for our children, BE Free Church staff members and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies. All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to their ministry area leader, or a member of the pastoral staff.

### **SUSPENSION: CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION**

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child will be immediately suspended from participation in BE Free Church Children's Ministries. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or Child Protective agencies.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act may be prohibited from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming that involves children, students or vulnerable populations at BE Free Church. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment from BE Free Church.

Knowingly failing to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for termination (employee) or removal (volunteer). Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children, students or vulnerable populations at BE Free Church.

## **REPORTING ABUSE OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE**

BE Free Church is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children 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 the Pastoral Staff and the Police Department, Child Protective Services, or other appropriate agency.

Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible that a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to groom a child for sexual abuse. Please report 'grooming' behavior, policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to an immediate supervisor, such that the church may take appropriate action to safeguard children in the program.

We report suspected or alleged abuse or neglect of children to the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF)

**Abuse Hotline: 1-800-842-2288**

Because many adults are unfamiliar with Connecticut reporting requirements and may be fearful of the process, BE Free Church utilizes a 'tandem or dual report' model, where permitted. A 'dual report' occurs when a BE Free Church supervisor reports the suspicion or allegation together with the individual who saw, heard or received information causing him or her to suspect abuse or neglect.

This practice is not required, or intended to inhibit any staff member or volunteer from reporting to law enforcement, DCF, or the abuse hotline directly. Instead, it is meant to facilitate reporting, protect children and support individuals who may not feel able or willing to report alone.

No permission is needed from BE Free Church before reporting to law enforcement personnel or the Child Abuse Hotline.

All reports made to law enforcement or DCF are to be reported to church pastoral staff or ministry leaders within 24 hours.

When in doubt, report.

## **Mental Health - Suicide, suicidal thoughts, self harm**

Many leaders are unsure about how to address sensitive mental health areas. The following information is provided to help leaders recognize and respond effectively. A leader is not expected to assess 'risk' or plan intervention for a child but rather recognize signs of suicidal thoughts and self-harm, and to encourage help for the the child.

**Suicidal ideation** refers to thinking about or planning suicide.

**Self-harm** is behavior that is self-directed and deliberately results in injury or the potential for injury to oneself.

If a child directly expresses feelings, actions, inclinations, or verbal communication related to suicide or self-harm to a leader, or a leader witnesses something concerning:

- Remain calm.
- Get help: tell an appropriate ministry leader.
- National Suicide Prevention Line for assistance 800-273- 8255
- Complete an incident report
- Inform parents/guardians of the incident and offer support.

## **Child Safety Committee**

### **CHILD SAFETY COMMITTEE**

Recognizing the importance of providing and maintaining a safe environment for children, BE Free Church will appoint and maintain a Child Safety Committee, which will meet a minimum twice yearly.

The purpose of the Child Safety Committee is to enable BE Free Church Children's Ministries to carry out appropriate ministry activities while safeguarding program participants against emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

### **COMPOSITION**

The Child Safety Committee will be comprised of the following members but not limited to:

- the Associate Pastor
- the Director of Children's Ministries
- a member of the Elder Board
- a member of the church body with relevant experience and expertise

### **RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Safety Committee will be charged with the following duties:

Applying and communicating existing BE Free Church policies and procedures related to children's safety and risk management issues.

Monitoring all Children's Ministries programs for ongoing compliance with safety policies.

Making recommendations to the BE Free Church Board of Elders regarding safety issues.

Report regularly to the Elder Board

Reporting annually to the church membership at the BE Free Church annual meeting

## **Children's Ministry Staff Monitoring Plan**

### **BUILDING SAFETY AND SUPERVISION**

Every ministry area leader is responsible for ensuring that the utilized areas (indoors and outdoors) are monitored and supervised during programming that serves children. This may include unobserved monitoring of staff members, volunteers and children. No child will ever be left unattended in a ministry area or on a playground during regular programming, classes or activities. If questions or concerns arise related to any person in the area, a ministry area leader or pastoral staff member should be notified immediately.

**Two trained, screened volunteers/staff should supervise children at all times.**

Avoid being alone with an individual child in any room or during any ministry program. If one supervising volunteer/staff must leave a group of children, another volunteer or employee must be notified so that the *Two Person Rule* can be followed.

If two individuals serving in a room are related to one another, a third unrelated volunteer or staff member must be present.

If an unusual circumstance occurs and you find yourself alone with a single child, take the child to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: if a child is the last in a class to be picked up by a parent, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present.)

If you need to talk with a child alone, do it in the hallway or a highly visible area, or have another leader with you. After every ministry event, ensure that every room, area and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

### **PLAYGROUNDS**

On the playground, remember to circulate, watching children during play periods, giving particular attention to areas not easily seen from all viewpoints. (Example: under slides, in corners, behind structures). Any two children together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area of the playground.

### **Child Safety Measures**

#### **VOLUNTEER TO CHILD RATIOS**

BE Free Church is committed to providing adequate supervision in all Children's Ministries programs. Accordingly, the following worker to child ratios will be observed:

<b>Program</b>	<b>Workers</b>	<b>Children</b>
Nursery	2	8
Preschool, 2 & 3 years old	2	12
Preschool, 4 & 5 years old	2	18
Elementary	2	20
Sports and Art Camp	2	20

If a worker is 'out of ratio' it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify the ministry area leader. Ministry area leaders will make diligent efforts to find substitute workers to immediately bring worker to children ratios into compliance with BE Free Church policy.

#### **RELEASE OF CHILDREN**

Children's Ministries 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.

It is presumed a person who drops off a child or student has authority to pick up the child.

In the event that staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact their ministry area leader, or a member of the pastoral staff before releasing the child.

## **Disciplinary Policies**

### **DISCIPLINE**

It is BE Free Church's policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. Use this approach as appropriate:

Approach the child calmly and respectfully asking to stop the behavior.

If the child repeats the action, guide them to a quiet place – separate from the other children – for a short but designated period of time. Stay within sight of others, and avoid being alone (or unseen) with the child.

Provide the child with a simple, understandable reason for the separation, and a clear explanation of your expectations.

After a 3rd time, refer to a staff member. A staff member may inform a parent or guardian, who may be asked to become involved in redirecting misbehavior. Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported to ministry area leaders.

As a discipline method never...

Yell at a child

Grab a child

Threaten a child. Always follow through with your word

Hit a child.

Confront a parent in front of others.

Humiliate a child

### **BULLYING**

Verbal, physical or emotional bullying is not acceptable in BE Free Church ministry programs. At the first sign of bullying in any form, act decisively, and inform your ministry area leader.

First Offense: Issue a warning to the child and a general reminder to the group that this kind of interaction is wrong. Complete an incident report

Second Offense: Pull the offending child(ren) from the group (in a seen or supervised location) and discuss the inappropriate interaction or behavior. Set clear parameters and behavioral goals. Let the child know that the next step is communication with a pastor and the child's parents. Notify the ministry area leader of ANY signs of bullying or verbal abuse. Complete an incident report

Check in with the target child(ren) who may have been bullied to ensure emotional and physical safety.

Third Offense: Send the child to a pastor or ministry supervisor for a phone call (or communication onsite) with his or her parent(s) and possible removal from the activity or event. Complete an incident report

## **Restroom Policies**

Two volunteer systems of supervision are present during restroom use.

### **NURSERY CHILDREN (INCLUDING TOILET TRAINING AGE)**

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

#### **DIAPERING**

Only nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will undertake the diapering of children of either sex.

Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of other nursery workers.

Children will never be left unattended on changing tables.

Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in nursery will be recorded on the registration cards ("Seth Adams has a medicine in the bag for rash.")

Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.

Children should be changed on changing stations only.

#### **TOILET TRAINING**

Only nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will participate in toilet training efforts with children of either sex.

When children are taken into bathrooms the door will be left partially open; a single nursery worker should assist if a child requires toileting help.

Young children who are toilet training will never be left unattended in bathrooms.

Parents should be consulted on each child's progress in the toilet training process before leaving the child with volunteers or staff members. Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in the nursery will be recorded on the registration card ("Georgia can use the toilet, but she needs to be reminded – ask her if she needs to go.")

Children should be assisted in straightening their clothing before returning to the room with other children.

“Accidents” should be handled by reassuring the child and completing the changing of diapers or underwear and clothing. Extra diapers are available from BE Free Church in the children’s area, if the parent has not furnished such.

### **CHILDREN AGES 4 AND UP**

If you must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, seek out another worker to accompany you. If another worker is not available, go to the exterior bathroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance. Do not enter the restroom.

If a child requires immediate assistance, leave the exterior bathroom door open when entering the bathroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing his or her toileting 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.

If restroom use is required:

Only trained, screened volunteers/ workers will assist children in the restroom.

Only one child at a time in a single toilet facility.

When a worker is assisting a child, the door must not be locked, and must remain ajar. In general, children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities. Encourage children to do all they can for themselves.

All students in PreK - Grade 3 must be escorted to the restroom by a leader. 4th grade students and up may go to restrooms unescorted.

Be aware if a student repeatedly asks to use the restroom and stays there for unusual periods of time. Communicate this behavior to a ministry area leader and parent/legal guardian if it occurs.

A single staff member or volunteer should never take a lone child to the restroom.

### **SPECIAL NEEDS**

Parents should offer instruction to staff members or volunteers to change the diapers of individuals with special needs. After the age of 4, parents or legal guardians will change the diapers of all individuals with special needs. If someone with special needs requires assistance using the restroom, a special needs volunteer may assist them in the restroom.

### **Nudity**

Staff members and volunteers in BE Free Church’s Children’s Ministries should never be nude in the presence of children in their care. In the event there is a situation that may call for or contemplate the possibility of nudity (i.e. changing clothes during a pool party, weekend or overnight retreat, etc.), staff member/volunteer determine an appropriate approach for arrangements of showering or changing clothes which will allow for the privacy of all individuals involved to be maintained.

## **Tobacco/Marijuana Use/Intoxicants**

BE Free Church requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco or marijuana products in church facilities, while in the presence of children or their parents, or during BE Free Church activities or programs. BE Free Church is a tobacco-free and marijuana-free facility inside and on walkways.

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or marijuana or any illegal drugs while in any BE Free Church facility, while traveling with children, or while working with or supervising children. In addition, Ministry area leaders may suspend the activities of any volunteer if a legal, prescribed medication produces inappropriate behaviors.

## **Medication / First Aid**

Medication may only be administered by trained staff, with written permission from parents or guardians. Otherwise, do not administer medication of any kind to any child while serving in ministry programs, including 'over the counter' drugs.

Basic First Aid can be administered as needed with a communication to both parents and BE Free Church through an Incident Report.

## **Interactions with Children**

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and children should be positive and uplifting. BE Free Church staff members and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of children.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to children in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff members and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children.

Staff members and volunteers should never conduct one-to-one, unobserved meetings or interaction with children while participating in the BE Free Church Children's Ministry program. Another adult who has completed the BE Free Church application and screening process should always be present.

## **SEXUALLY ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS**

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with children, and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any child in the program.

## **SEXUALLY ORIENTED MATERIAL**

Staff members and volunteers in Children's Ministries at BE Free Church are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children.

## **PHYSICAL CONTACT**

BE Free Church promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our Children's Ministries while protecting children. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in Children's Ministries programs:

Hugging, pats on the back and other forms of appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and children are important for children's development, and are generally suitable in the church setting.

Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching or displays of affection should be immediately reported to a ministry area leader, or pastoral staff.

Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child, and never be based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.

Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other children or children's staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.

Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff members or volunteers in Children's Ministries must foster trust at all times. Personal conduct must be above reproach.

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

Children's staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.

## **PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**

Please dress in suitable attire as a role model to students.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for children. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when workers are involved in the transportation of children:

Children should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided. Staff members and volunteers are to avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one child in transport unless a second screened trained volunteer is present.

Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with children while in vehicles.

Hands free devices only may be utilized by the driver while driving BE Free Church vans, or vehicles owned or rented or driving for a BE Free Church event.

All drivers of BE Free Church events should have a valid and current driver's license, active insurance, and drivers history. Driver's are responsible to communicate a change in driver's status promptly to Ministry area leaders.

## **Parental Involvement**

Parents are encouraged to visit any and all services and programs in which their child is involved at BE Free Church. Parents have an open invitation to observe all programs and activities in which their child is involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with their children's programs at BE Free Church will be required to complete the BE Free Church volunteer application and screening process.

Parents who leave a child in the care of BE Free Church staff members and volunteers during church services or activities will be contacted if their child becomes ill, injured, demonstrates concerning behavior, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in Children's Ministries programs.

*Approved by BE Free Board of Elders 3/8/23*

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

This page is to be signed, detached, and delivered to the Ministry Area Leader.

I have received and read a copy of BE Free Church's Children's Ministries Policies and Procedures and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving or working at BE Free Church.

I have reviewed the duties listed in my ministry position description, and I agree to fulfill these duties. I understand I may choose to end my employment or voluntary service at BE Free Church at any time (If possible, I will provide two weeks' notice to my ministry area leader).

I acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this handbook in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between me and BE Free Church. If applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no monetary compensation for hours worked.

I understand it is my responsibility to communicate any applicable changes in my life that may impact my role with volunteering or working with children

I acknowledge receipt of the BE Free Church policies and procedures manual.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Staff Member or Volunteer's name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Staff Member or Volunteer's signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Received and reviewed by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ministry Role

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_