

Springs of Grace Lutheran Church

Policy for Protecting Children and Youth in Church Activities

Springs of Grace Lutheran Church
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Springs of Grace Lutheran Church Policy for Protecting Children and Youth in Church Activities

This policy was adapted (1) from “Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church,” published by Church Law and Tax Report; (2) from Youth Protection Guidelines: Training for Volunteer Leaders and Parents of the Boy Scouts of America; (3) from the “Policy and Procedure Manual of Youth and Young Adult Ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee”; and (4) Bethany Lutheran Church Policy for the Protection of Children.

Introduction:

On _____, the Church Council of Springs of Grace Lutheran Church adopted the following policies and procedures to help keep our church a safe sanctuary for our children and youth. Fortunately, this policy is not initiated in response to problems within Springs of Grace Lutheran Church, but it is prompted by awareness of problems in other churches and organizations that have experienced the abuse of children by adult employees and/or volunteers in the church/organization, as well as by other minors. The advice of experts from the *Church Law and Tax Report* has shaped our response and assures us the protection of our children and

youth and also helps protect our church from unfounded charges and legal liability. In no way will we allow these policies and procedures to interfere with our service of Christ. They will enhance it.

Other agencies in our society have taken similar steps with good results. Among them are organizations (Boy Scouts of America), YMCA and YWCA. Most people are accustomed to these considerations in their volunteer activities with children and youth outside the church, and many people are accustomed to such policies in their places of employment. The experience of other churches who have adopted similar policies is positive. Unfortunately, most churches have not been motivated to take this action until after a problem has occurred. We, of Springs of Grace Lutheran Church, are motivated because we are entrusted with the spiritual, educational and moral development of our children and youth.

The following policies shall be followed by all professional and lay people in their work for Springs of Grace Lutheran Church involving any activities with children, youth, and minors.

A. Screening of Lay and Professional Workers ("Leaders")

The Congregation Council reserves the right to screen any and all Lay and Professional workers for activities of the congregation. The council also reserves the right to verify information regarding background and history of activities with minors, as well as doing a check on legal history. This includes people working in youth activities, Confirmation, music and educational activities, such as Sunday School. No one who has had a criminal sexual or physical abuse violation will be permitted to work with children, youth, or minor. Leaders shall be informed of the rules they are required to follow in their activities with minors and shall be required to sign that they will faithfully follow these requirements.

B. History of Sexual Misconduct

Any adult who has been convicted of sexual misconduct or abuse may not participate in any capacity in Springs of Grace Lutheran Church programs for children or youth, or minors.

C. Dating

Adult leaders shall not date or be romantically involved with a Springs of Grace Lutheran Church youth. If there is a current relationship, the adult cannot participate in Springs of Grace Lutheran Church events with that minor.

D. Two-Deep Leadership

Two adult leaders must be present at each activity with minors. Exceptions are Sunday School classes held in rooms with a window in the door. Such activities are to be monitored. The Nursery shall strive to have at least two leaders always. Where two adult leaders are not available for Sunday School or catechetical classes, the doors of the rooms shall be open at all times.

E. Individual Consultation

Individual consultation between adults and minors must be done within the two-deep framework. In situations that require personal conferences, mentoring, or counseling, this shall be conducted in the church offices *with at least one other approved leader present in the area* (though not necessarily in the office). No Exceptions.

As a rule, the counseling should be as public as possible, without sacrificing effectiveness. Seclusion should be avoided. If conducted in an office, it shall only be in an office with an unobstructed window in the door or wall. Unplanned individual contact on outings (such as for counseling purposes) must be done in view of another adult or minor. Planned individual contact outside the church building must occur only in public places and with the prior consent of the minor and parent or guardian. Examples would be a ride home, or a conversation over a coke between a disciple and mentor.

F. Respect of Privacy

Adult leaders need to respect the privacy of minors in situations such as use of rest rooms, changing into swimming suits, or taking showers on overnight outings, and intrude only insofar as health and safety require. Adult Leaders also need to protect their own privacy in similar situations.

G. Separate accommodations

A minimum of two adults shall be present at any overnight activity. If participants are both male and female, the adults should be both male and female. If these conditions can not be met, the event should be canceled. When camping, no minor is permitted to sleep in the tent of an adult other than his or her own parent or guardian.

On outings that require that an adult share the same room as a minor (such as ELCA national gatherings) the minors and parents or guardians shall give prior written consent. The adult should avoid occupying the same bed as a minor, again with the exception of prior written consent of a parent or guardian. Males and females shall sleep in separate rooms at events and should have separate access to bathroom facilities. When separate facilities are not available, times for male and female use should be scheduled and posted for showers.

H. Appropriate Attire

Proper clothing for activities is required, e.g., skinny-dipping is not appropriate as part of church activities.

I. Housing

When private homes are used for overnight events, the program staff member will make final approval of all adults involved as hosts, hostesses and chaperones. At no time may only one child or youth dwell in one guest home.

J. No Secret Activities

There are no "secret" activities or organizations recognized by Springs of Grace Lutheran Church. All aspects of the church program are open to observation by parents and

congregational leaders. Confidentiality or secrecy is not a privilege of adult leaders while involved in church activities with youth, but a privilege of the youth.

K. Transportation

Transportation to and from events is the responsibility of the families. During events, program staff member drivers should avoid dropping off or picking up minors without being accompanied by another adult. The Springs of Grace Congregation Council shall set standards for who is permitted to drive during events. Any deviations from such standards shall require the prior consent of the parent and must be reported to the next person in the line of responsibility. Insurance for official church activities is already included in our blanket policy.

L. Constructive Discipline

Discipline used in church activities should be constructive and reflect Christian values. Corporal punishment is never permitted. Any actions requiring discipline shall be disclosed to the child's parent(s) upon conclusion of the activity or sooner.

M. Hazing Prohibited

Physical hazing and initiations are prohibited and may not be included as part of any Springs of Grace Lutheran Church activity.

N. No Sexualizing

No sexual behavior is permitted with Springs of Grace Lutheran Church minors. Other behaviors which are abusive, but do not involve physical contact, are also prohibited. Examples include but are not limited to sexual comments, the showing of sexual material and the exposure of sexual parts of the minor's body and/or the adult's body. There shall be no inappropriate communications between a church employee or volunteer including, but not limited to, face-to-face conversations, telephone conversations, texts, emails, written correspondence, etc.

O. Gifts

Child and youth leaders shall not give personal gifts or money to individual children or youth without first notifying the parents and direct supervisor. An exception is the Disciples/Mentor program in Confirmation (if used), where gift giving is an encouraged part of the program. In such situations, gifts shall be of an appropriate nature. Gifts to entire classes are acceptable.

P. Nursery

The nursery (if so established) shall have an identification system that links the child with the parent in a way that prevents the possibility of someone else taking the child. The nursery should strive to have at least two adult leaders at all times of operation.

Q. Reporting of Violations of These Rules

Persons covered by these rules are required to notify the President of Springs of Grace Congregation Council and the Pastor of any violations of these rules immediately upon learning of the violation. Suspicions of child abuse occurring during an event shall be

reported immediately to the event coordinator, and to the local authorities. The alleged perpetrator should be removed and supervised until the proper authorities arrive on the scene.

R. Mandatory reporting of abuse

According to South Carolina State Law, certain individuals are required to report child abuse (mandated reporters). See the South Carolina Department of Social Services website (<https://dss.sc.gov/content/customers/protection/cps/required.pdf>) for a comprehensive list.

There are four types of child abuse. Physical abuse is the deliberate physical injuring of a child by an adult. Sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in any sexual act or situation for the gratification or benefit of an adult. Emotional abuse is maltreatment which causes low self-esteem in a child or undue fear or anxiety, or other damage to a child's well-being caused by such acts as angry fault finding, humiliating and belittling a child for mistakes or failures, and deliberate inattention to a child's emotional needs. Neglect is not providing necessary food, clothing, shelter, health care, psychological nurturing, education or supervision for a child.

Variance from these guidelines can only be permitted when written consent is given by the Springs of Grace Church Congregation Council for deviation from a specific guideline for identified reasons. In order to comply with these restrictions, we have already made several modifications to our space. Further modifications may be necessary.

Adult leaders are liable for disciplinary action for not following these guidelines, even if no abuse can be established.

These policies shall go into effect on _____.

Signed:

Pastor

President, Church Council

Vice President

Chair of Education and Youth

Chair of Worship and Music

Chair of Property

Chair of Stewardship

Chair of Evangelism

Chair of Social Ministry

Recorded by:

Council Secretary