

Children’s Ministries General Policy Manual

Bethany Community Church

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Children’s Ministry Objectives

Bethany Community Church cares about children and their parents. We strive to provide a nurturing, safe and secure learning environment both for the children and staff of each of our Children’s Ministries. This manual seeks to provide the framework for maintaining such an environment. As we lay out these “policies” for our Children’s Ministries, may we never lose sight of the goal – to glorify Jesus and worship Him through investing our lives in children.

The Children’s Ministry Programs at Bethany Community Church are intended to be a resource to come alongside parents as they teach and disciple their children. Ministry programs will provide a nurturing environment that allows children to discover truths from God’s Word that are fundamental to their spiritual development and will establish the foundation for a relationship with Jesus Christ. The programs will clearly present the gospel and provide Bible study, worship activities, mission experiences, and discipleship with the goal of proclaiming Christ to the children and preparing them to worship Him forever (Col 1:28-29).

Values: T.R.A.I.N.

TTruth-based

We believe that God's word is foundational truth, and it is our heart to train every child to use it as their guide, authority, and conscience in everything.

RRelational

We believe that life-change happens best in the context of relationships. Gifted, godly, and passionate adults who exhibit Christ to children, their families, and each other will show kids how to do the same. It is our prayer that this modeling will impact God's Kingdom for generations to come.

AAdventurous

We believe that church should be fun and that the Gospel of Jesus Christ should never be presented in a boring manner. Therefore, it is our commitment to model for the children a vibrant, growing relationship with Christ and to challenge them to the same.

IInnovative

We believe in inspiring kids to greatness by pursuing excellence in our programs. We want to be innovative and creative while examining everything we do to make sure it remains biblical, relevant and effective.

NNurturing

We believe that spiritual growth and nurturing happens best in an atmosphere of emotional safety, physical security, and sanitary conditions. We are committed to exceptional standards in these areas.

Bethany Children's Ministries Entail

Sunday Morning:

- Sunday School (9-10am)
 - Infants – 12th Grade
- Service (10:30-11:45am)
 - Infants – 2nd Grade

Wednesday Evening:

- Awana meets on Wednesday nights during the school year and includes:
 - Cubbies – 3/4 yr olds
 - Sparks – K – 2nd grade
 - T & T – 3rd-5th
 - 6th graders have the option on Wednesday nights of attending T & T or the EDGE Middle School.
- Both EDGE Middle School (6th-8th) and IMAGE High School (9th-12th) youth groups meet on Wednesday evenings throughout the year.

Other Events:

- Vacation Bible Camp is for a week each summer and children are typically divided by grade.
- Buddy Program assists families with kids of all ages dealing with developmental disabilities to enable the child to participate in our regular ministries by providing a buddy to assist them.
- Sunday Evening Childcare is provided for our once-a-month evening services for kids from nursery through 2nd grade.
- Wednesday Evening Childcare is provided for the children of our Awana and Youth leaders in nursery through 3 years old (prior to being able to attend Cubbies).
- Childcare for other ministries and events such as beMom and the Bethany Biblical Counseling Conference.

Worker Enlistment and Screening Process

Anyone wishing to work with children or youth at Bethany Community Church must have been a regular attender for at least six months. One must be a regular attender for three months to be a caregiver in the nursery. On occasion these requirements may be shortened with approval by both the Staff Elder or Lay Elder assigned to the Children or Youth Ministries and the Ministry Leader. All above positions, with the exceptions of workers/caregivers, must either have joined the church through membership or have initiated that process. All children's ministry workers are screened using the following procedures:

1. Application

All children and youth ministry leaders and volunteers must complete the Primary Screening Form for Children or Youth Work online. You will receive an email invitation to fill out the form.

2. Interview

All children and youth ministry leaders and volunteers may be interviewed by either the Staff/Lay Elder or the Area Leader in the area in which they wish to serve.

3. Criminal History Check

Individuals who have been arrested for, charged with, are on regular probation for, or have been convicted of sexually oriented or sex related crimes, either misdemeanor or felony, cannot serve in any area of children's ministry. Bethany Community Church will rely upon law enforcement and reference checks for this information. This check will be rerun by default every 5 years.

4. Abuse Training

All children and youth ministry leaders and volunteers must complete the DCFS online training as well as watch BCC's own Oppression Training video prior to beginning to serve in our ministries. The DCFS training will need renewed every 3 years while the Oppression training will only be required once.

5. Age Requirements

Individuals must be 18 or older to work in the infant area of the nursery. Children younger than 13 may serve alongside their parents in the toddler room and Children's Church but are never placed in a recruited volunteer position. They may only serve alongside a parent (so would be an "extra" volunteer in the classroom). Youth who are 13 and older may serve in the toddler nursery or Children's Church, but once a child turns 13, if they would like to serve on a volunteer team it is required that they fill out a youth volunteer application and a youth reference form must be filled out by a non-family member from BCC who can vouch for them before they are "cleared" to serve. Anyone wishing to work with the middle school and high school aged youth must have graduated from high school at least one year prior to beginning to serve.

- VBC

Seventh grade and older may serve but individuals under the age of 13 will still need to serve alongside their parents. Workers must be 16 years old to work in nursery, unless their parent is serving alongside them.

- Sunday Night Service

Sixth grade and older may serve but individuals under age 13 will still need to serve alongside their parents unless worked out before hand with childcare coordinator to serve alongside other competent adult replacements for their parent.

Volunteer and Child Protection

Bethany Community Church intends to ensure the health, safety and well-being of volunteers and children. As a precaution and to ensure accountability from one adult to another, the following rules will be adhered to:

1. At least two adult volunteers should be in a ministry area at all times.
2. Restroom Policy
 - Volunteers will routinely need to assist children in the restroom with hand washing. Only children three years or younger should need help with the toilet.
 - It is our practice to do the rule of three when taking children to the bathroom.
 - Boys, kindergarten and younger, who require the assistance of a volunteer in the restroom may be taken to the women's restroom by a woman. Boys who are first grade and older need to use the men's restroom only.
 - A volunteer must let a hall monitor, or nearest adult, know when they are taking a child and/or children into the restroom if another volunteer is not accompanying them.
 - For children who do not need assistance or oversight in the bathroom, the volunteer must check the restroom before the child enters it and then wait outside for the child.
3. Appropriate touch is part of a healthy ministry. Using good judgment, the following are appropriate ways to touch kids:
 - an arm around the shoulder
 - walking hand in hand
 - carrying small children piggy-back
 - short congratulatory or greeting hugs
 - assuring pat on the back or shoulder
 - handshake and high-fives

The following are ways a volunteer should NEVER touch:

- never touch a child in anger or with aggression
- never touch a child in any manner that may be construed as sexually suggestive
- never touch a child's private parts (for example: any area that would normally be covered by a swim suit)

Discipline

Children’s ministry workers are not to administer physical discipline, such as spanking. Using physical restraint to prevent a child from doing something disruptive or dangerous is permitted and may, in some instances, be necessary. Affirmation and verbal praise is always encouraged for appropriate behavior.

The guidelines we want to share with the children on Sunday mornings, Wednesday nights, and at any other children’s ministries events are called the “Up Rules”:

1. Sit up – Please keep your back against the back of your chair.
2. Listen up – Please stay quiet so you and others around you can hear the teacher, and you can hear the instruction given.
3. Look up – Please keep your eyes on the teacher so that you are not distracted or the one distracting. Please do not bring any personal items (see definition below) to class. If you realize you accidentally have one in your pocket, do not take it out of your pocket. There is a likelihood that it could be temporarily taken away and given back at the end of class or given back to a parent.
4. Hand up – Please raise your hand when you have a comment or question so that all in the room can be heard.
5. Zip up – Please stay quiet so that the teacher can be heard, and we can all learn from God’s Word.

While these rules pertain directly to the teaching time, it is also our expectation that the children will (if applicable) share toys, help with clean up, and act appropriately during snack time. If a child is not cooperating we will adhere to the following procedure:

1. A warning is given to the child to abide by the guidelines given at the start of class or the lesson.
2. If the child continues to struggle, he/she may be quietly moved to another location in the room still under teacher supervision and still hearing the lesson to help them to obey.
3. Next, the child may be moved away from the teaching time but still in the room or nearby for a conversation with a teacher/helper--the purpose of this is to get to the heart of the child's disobedience. After the conversation, the child would be returned to listen to the instruction time.
4. If the child continues to struggle, the ministry leader should be informed and their parent can either be called to come get the child or he/she will be taken to the child’s parent/guardian so that the child can spend time with their home authority for further instruction. If the parent is

not available (in cases like Awana or Vacation Bible Camp), the child will make a phone call with a leader's oversight for further instruction.

5. If, after talking with a parent/guardian, that adult desires the child to come back into the classroom or lesson for continued instruction in our children's ministries, this process will start over again. If the process has to be repeated the teacher/helper should keep their ministry leader apprised of the situation.

Suggestions for maintaining discipline:

1. Pray for your kids and your patience consistently. Ask the Lord to guide you throughout the class and to give you wisdom for each situation.
2. Plan your class time thoroughly. Often the best deterrent to a discipline policy is a well-planned class.
3. Be consistent and prompt in handling discipline problems. Discipline must be consistent to be effective. Do not threaten a consequence unless you intend to follow through. At the beginning of class it may be necessary to remind your class of the guidelines.
4. Seek both a resolution and reconciliation in any conflict situations.
5. Acknowledge and verbally reward positive behavior. Encourage children who are behaving and following the rules.

Note: We ask that no personal items (toys, electronic devices, etc) be brought to Sunday School or Children's Church except for a Bible, writing utensil, and note-taking pad (if applicable). If parents have suggestions for items missing from the classrooms that would enhance their child's learning, please let us know. We recognize that electronic devices can contain a Bible application, but for the sake of removing temptation to use the device for other purposes and the distraction of other students, we ask that these devices be left at home on Sunday mornings. We also understand that, while a child may be at a level of maturity to be able to handle electronics in a children's ministries setting, the children around them may not be able to focus on the teaching of God's Word in light of the electronic device.

Abuse Awareness

For more info please see <http://bethanycommunitychurch.org/abuse>

It is very important as we care for the kids of BCC to be aware of child abuse. For the purpose of clarity we have defined terms from the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) and provided possible signs from Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS):

- **Child:** any person under the age of 18 years.
- **Physical abuse:** actual or potential physical harm inflicted by another person, adult or child.
 - Possible Signs of Physical Abuse may include:
 - Some children show obvious, outward signs of abuse, such as:
 - Unexplained marks on the body (cuts, bruises, welts, burns, black eyes, fractures or dislocations)
 - Marks hidden from typically exposed areas of skin
 - Other children may show more subtle indicators, such as behavioral changes, including:
 - Extreme vigilance or watchfulness
 - Bullying smaller children
 - Poor social interactions with peers
 - Extreme fear of parents or caregivers (e.g. does not want to go home)
 - Harming animals
 - NOTE: You may notice some of these signs after a child has stopped attending for a period of time as well. However, be aware that some children will not display any overt behavioral changes.
- **Sexual abuse:** forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities that he or she does not fully understand and has no choice or legal standing to give consent.
 - Possible Signs of Sexual Abuse may include:
 - sexual knowledge beyond what is age appropriate
 - recurring pain or itching in private areas
 - sexually transmitted diseases
 - frequent bladder or urinary tract infections
 - unexplained regression or fear
 - sexual acting out behaviors
 - NOTE: Some children will NOT display any overt behavioral changes. Sexual predators often abuse children in ways that do not leave physical signs.
- **Neglect:** a persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or psychological needs. It includes the failure to give proper care, supervise, protect from harm, or provide for nutrition, shelter, and safe living conditions.
 - Possible Signs of Neglect may include:
 - Often hungry in the morning

- Poor hygiene
- Evidence of no or poor supervision
- Underweight, poor growth, failure to thrive
- Dressed inappropriately for the weather
- Erratic attendance
- **Emotional abuse:** persistent emotional maltreatment of a child. Emotional abuse includes acts such as [overbearing] restriction of movement, degradation, humiliation, bullying, threats, or discrimination. In addition, emotional abuse can also be found where an abuser controls and manipulates information so that the victim carries a distorted view of reality.
 - Possible Signs of Emotional Abuse may include:
 - Being apathetic, depressed, withdrawn, passive
 - Seeming overly anxious when faced with new situations or people
 - Being disorganized
 - Being distrustful
 - Being rigidly compulsive
 - Taking on adult or parental roles and responsibilities
 - Throwing tantrums or seeming impulsive, defiant, antisocial, aggressive, or self-destructive
 - Being fearful or hyper-alert
 - Showing a lack of creativity or exploration
 - NOTE: While individually these signs may not indicate any form of Emotional Abuse, the more signs that are present would give stronger indication for concern.

Abuse Reporting Procedures

If a Bethany Community Church staff, ministry leader, or volunteer has reasonable cause to suspect any form of child abuse, a timely response is expected with the utmost concern for the victim, parent, or other parties involved. The accused will be treated with dignity and support. Without evidence as described below to the contrary, we will assume such complaints are legitimate. A false claim will be taken seriously as well, with BCC making every effort to clear the name and reputation of the falsely accused. Taking into consideration all circumstances, BCC will deal with the perpetrator of false charges in a polite manner. When it becomes necessary to report actual or suspected child abuse, the protection of children must be the most important concern. It is the responsibility of any staff, ministry lead, or volunteer charged with the care of children to report all cases of child abuse he or she observes or suspects and to report visible signs of alleged abuse to whomever is overseeing his or her ministry immediately. Please note, it can be very easy to second guess whether to share something of this nature but is always better and desired that volunteers overshare to make sure there is clarity, knowing there is wisdom and strength in numbers. Always trust your gut and if in doubt, tell a ministry lead.

The ministry lead will then contact the staff or elder overseeing their ministry to begin the reporting process and that staff or elder along with the help of the ministry lead and/or volunteer will assure the safety and protection of the child(ren) who may have been harmed. We will not confront the accused until the safety of the child or student is secured.

From that consensus, once a determination is made that abuse has occurred or may have occurred, we will immediately notify the parents or guardian. If the parent or guardian is under suspicion, we will call DCFS first. We will also determine what other numbers should be called as shown at the end of this section. If the child is in imminent danger, 911 will be called.

If the accused serves in ministry at BCC, they will be relieved of their roles until all investigations are concluded and the accused is cleared of wrong doing.

It is appropriate to show concern and offer comfort for the alleged victim as necessary. This should be the objective from the moment the allegation is received. We will extend whatever resources are available to the alleged victim, the accused, and their families. The staff, elders, ministry leads, and volunteer should not allow themselves to be drawn into discussions of the truth or falsehood of the allegation, or assign blame, or take any steps to establish or negate the allegation. This could compromise or jeopardize official investigations.

The privacy and confidentiality of all involved will be of primary concern.

Only the official spokesman of Bethany Community Church should comment to media about the situation, including but not limited to: underlying facts, allegations, litigation (or threat of litigation), or related proceedings, and that only after consultation with legal counsel. The Senior

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Pastor or his designee in consultation with the elders will determine when and what to state publicly.

Important Telephone Numbers:

- Washington Police Department – 309-444-2313
- IL Dept. DCFS – 1-800-25- ABUSE (252-2873)
- National Child Abuse Hotline – 1- 800-4-A-CHILD