

Children's' Ministry Policies and Guidelines

These guidelines and policies are a work in progress so changes and modifications may come as we continue to evaluate the progress of this ministry and its needs. At any time, if you have a question or an idea, please see the Children's Coordinator, Jenni Hypes.

At this point, we have three different age groups for the Sunday morning children's ministry. They are referred to as the nursery (0-5 years old), Juniors (part of the time and are 3-5 years old), and Lamb's End (1st grade – 5th grade). No exceptions should be made to these guidelines without talking to the Children's Coordinator first.

The nursery is open from 10 minutes before the service to the end of the service. After worship, the volunteers for the Juniors and Lamb's End will come over with the kids for the other classes. The volunteers will keep the kids until church is complete and parents come and get them. If a parent takes too long to come get a child, one of the volunteers can come over to get that parent. We would like to get the parents used to coming over to get their kids instead of bringing the kids to them unless there is a special need or situation.

The only people that should be in the Kid's Barn during this time are the kids in these age brackets and the volunteers on the schedule. If you feel you need some help or if you are ever in a situation where it's one volunteer and one child (which is not permitted), please see the Children's Coordinator to get assistance. If a parent wants to observe their child in class, please see the Children's Coordinator and we will make arrangements to let her know that they are.

Nursery Guidelines

Nursery workers should be in the nursery area at 10:20am to welcome parents and kids.

Until the window is in place, the door of the nursery must never be closed. Feel free to use the gate during classes.

For the most part, the kids should be playing in the nursery unless there are too many kids and you need to span out. In this case, go with the following overflow plan.

The older kids can use the Juniors room to play in but one of the volunteers must be with them while the other is with the babies. The adult workers should be in sight of each other on a regular basis as well. One important issue when this happens: Volunteers should work with the Juniors to have that room ready for when the Junior class volunteers come over. We don't want to cause additional challenges for that class by the room not being ready.

Diaper Changing Guidelines: This can only be done with two volunteers in the room together. No child should ever be left alone on the changing table. (For older kids, please see restroom guidelines)

Parent Supplied Items

We ask parents to bring any supplies needed for their children during their time in the care of the children's ministries including but not limited to diapers, wipes, bottled water and the like.

We do not let children stay in a soiled diaper or clothing so we will need extras available or the volunteers will ask the parent to come take over the care of their child.

Shared Volunteer

There is one volunteer position that is the helper to be shared by the nursery and the Junior classes (and sometimes for emergencies with Lamb's End if they have a need). Please work together to coordinate where this help is needed on that week. If you need more help than that one helper, again, please see the Children's Coordinator.

Juniors and Lamb's End Guidelines

Volunteers attend the worship portion of our church service and then come over after worship while bringing the Lamb's End aged kids with them (sometimes the service will have a unique structure that will change this. The Children's Coordinator will make volunteers aware of these changes on those days). When this transition is made, please do all you can to minimize the distraction of coming to the building by not having unneeded side conversations, helping the kids remember to be quiet and closing the front door.

The Junior's room is the front, downstairs room. Lamb's End will meet upstairs. The classes last until the end of the church service which ranges from 11:30am – Noon.

Bathroom Guidelines

Toddlers – They may need assistance in the bathroom. Please just keep the door open when helping them and let another adult or teen know where you are and what is going on.

Juniors – Either have one person stand at door looking into the hallway while door stays open or take all Juniors to bathroom at same time and have turns.

Lamb's End – Should be fine going to bathroom by themselves. If a child needs help, please coordinate with other volunteers to accommodate this need.

At no time should a child and volunteer be in the bathroom by themselves with the door shut.

Programming

Programming will be provided by the Children's Coordinator. Please do not deviate from the programming without talking to the Children's Coordinator. (this includes skipping lessons and substituting DVDs or game day).

Discipline Guidelines

It is important that the children know their boundaries and that we all stay consistent with these guidelines. This will provide an environment where everyone knows the structure and can enjoy the freedom within it.

For all ages, our guidelines for discipline are as follows....

- If a child is misbehaving, make sure you clarify that they are breaking a rule (ex. getting into something that's off limits, not respecting an adult, etc) and give them one warning
- If they continue the behavior, the child gets a time out which consists of sitting on a chair away from the action. They should only be in time out for the appropriate time. This time is coordinated as follows.... One minute for every year of the age of the child. For example, if the child is 2 years old, their time out is 2 minutes. If they are 4 years old, their time out is 4 minutes.
- If this does not rectify the situation, send one of the volunteers to come get the parent or guardian of that child and they will tend to the issue.

There will not be any hitting, no spanking, and no solitary confinement.

Accidents

Every effort will be made to provide a safe environment for all children. Serious accidents will be immediately reported to the parent or guardian. Minor incidents will be reported to the parents when the child is picked up. A volunteer who was in the room will fill out an incident report to be turned into the Children's Coordinator for both minor and major accidents. These forms are in the metal cabinet by the bathroom.

Affection Guidelines

All of us have different ways of showing affection depending on our backgrounds. The challenge becomes that these kids also come from different backgrounds and some things that are natural for you, are not ok for the children in our ministry. Please follow these guidelines as we show love in ways that are more comfortable for all.

The following are off limits (some are age appropriate and will be marked as such...)

- No kissing on the lips
- No pinching or hitting
- Do not touch any area that would be covered by a bathing suit if they had one on
- No excessive tickling (as determined by the Children's Coordinator)
- Children (Lamb's End and older) should not be sitting on a volunteer's lap or the lap of another child

Safe Hugging

Hugging is encouraged but be sensitive to how the child reacts to it. Some are not comfortable with hugging and their body language will suggest that to you. If this is the case, respect their comfort zones and find other ways to show love.

Hugging should never be done in a way where private parts are in the same area of each other. This is easy with the smaller children but with older kids, make sure you keep distance in any area where a child might get the wrong impression.

Reporting Abuse Guidelines

For the sake of our children, their families, and our ministry, we need to be prepared by knowing how to act and react if we suspect abuse of any kind. The statistics suggest that we have and will be working with kids that are either being emotionally, spiritually, sexually, or physically abused and we are here to protect them as much as we can.

In the next section, we will review some of the things you need to know on seeing the signs of abuse and how to report your concerns. But first, understand these following basics.

- If you ever suspect any kind of abuse, this must immediately be reported to the Children's Coordinator and she will guide you from there.
- If a child tells you they are being abused, this must immediately be reported to the Children's Coordinator and she will guide you from there.
- There is no room for your discretion on these. Depending on the circumstances, not only are we legally obligated to report the abuse, it is our desire to protect the child and will report the concern. Also, if you do not follow these policies correctly and we find the child is being abused, it could give the abuser a loop hole that let's them get away with it and leave the child in danger.
- If a child says to you something to the effect of "Can I tell you a secret?" You MUST say something to the effect of "Yes you can...but understand that if you tell me that someone is hurting you or someone else I may have to tell others to get you or them help." The worse thing is to say yes and find out they tell you something serious and you have to betray their trust.

Signs of Abuse

Physical signs could include....

- Lacerations and bruises – especially bruises of different colors suggesting repeated beatings
- Difficulty walking
- Irritation, pain, or injury of the groin area
- Difficulty with urination
- Discomfort when sitting
- Evident malnutrition
- Unattended physical or medical problems
- Inadequate clothing
- Shaped injuries that suggest an object (belt buckle, rope, human bite marks)
- Pressure bruises around the neck, ankles, or wrists

Behavioral signs may include...

- Anxious, nervous, or hostile toward adults
- Excessive fear of being approached or touched
- Sexual self-consciousness
- Sexual behavior or references that are out of the norm or too sophisticated for the child's age
- Behavior is withdrawn, fearful, infantile, or filled with fantasy
- Fear of going home

Verbal signs may include....

- “ _____ does things to me when we’re alone.”
- “ I don’t like to be alone with _____ “
- “ _____ fooled around with me.”
- “I’m afraid of _____”
- “Can I tell you a secret?” (See above)

Again, all suspicions or confirmations of possible abuse should immediately go to the Children’s Coordinator who will lead the situation through the proper channels. Any volunteer who is part of the incident will be required to fill out an incident report.

In most cases, you will not have any further legal interaction in the situation after you fulfill the above guidelines. However, if the situation goes to court, you could be called as a witness. If you follow the above guidelines, you will be fine and the child has the best chance of being protected.

Please see the Children’s Coordinator if you have any questions.