



Three Rivers Grace Church  
**Child Protection Policy**

## **1. Vision**

The Three Rivers Grace (3RG) Church Children's Ministry aims to come alongside parents to reach the next generation for Christ.

## **2. Mission**

To realize our vision, the mission of the Children's Ministry is to:

- Maintain a clean, safe, and secure environment in which your child can learn;
- Serve as a refreshing, encouraging, reminder for parents that children are a blessing from the Lord (Psalms 127:3);
- Serve with excellence and high morality in such a way that the name of Christ is not slandered (2 Peter 2:2)
- Teach God's Word and see young lives transformed as they grow in their faith (Deuteronomy 11:19; Proverbs 22:6);
- Allow children to experience the love of Christ through interactions with 3RG teachers, teaching assistants, and church staff;
- Explain to children the gospel of Jesus Christ (i.e., Christ died for our sins, was buried, and resurrected) through bible teaching (1 Corinthians 15:3-4);
- Shepherd the children's hearts to see the attributes of God in nature which is his creation (Romans 1:20)
- Help children experience the grace of God through loving interactions that implicitly teach the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- Pray for God the Holy Spirit to regenerate the children's hearts so that they can accept Christ as Lord (John 3:3);
- Teach those children who have accepted Christ as their Lord how to grow and mature in the faith, so that they can become adults who are complete, and lacking in nothing. (James 1:3-4)

## **3. Disclaimer**

This Child Protection Policy (CPP) has been written to explain the basic policies and methods that Three Rivers Grace Church is employing to protect children (primarily from birth to age 12) while on our church properties in Elliott (1028 Chartiers Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15220) and in McCandless (8713 Harmony Parkway, Pittsburgh, PA 15237) during times when ministries involving children are in session. The children referred to in this CPP have been voluntarily placed by their parents or legal guardians in the care of the church during church ministries and activities. While the two types of sexual predators are the power predator (the person who tries to abduct or kidnap a child by force) and persuasion predator (the person who puts on a false persona in order to get access to the children), this CPP is mainly focused on thwarting and uncovering the persuasion predator because he is most likely to attempt to enter the church for easy access to children. This policy

primarily aims to provide guidance related to activities on church property (although Children's Ministry workers are encouraged to apply and adopt the guidelines in this CPP at ministries and church activities which are *remote* from the church property as best as possible). Any cases of abuse, harm or neglect not related to the children's ministry at 3RG are not covered by this policy.

#### **4. Personnel Summary and Definitions**

*Adults.* In Pennsylvania, 18 is the age at which individuals are considered adults under the law.

*Children.* By state law, minors are individuals who are under age 18 and who are the legal responsibility of parents or legal guardians. This CPP refers to "children" as the sub-group of minors which are ages 12 and under.

*Member.* A member is an individual who is trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and has made a commitment to serve and be accountable to this local body of believers.

*Staff.* A staff person is an individual who is employed by 3RG church. Whether in direct contact with children or not, all 3RG church staff are required to receive background checks.

*Volunteers.* These are adults who serve 3RG in some aspect of the children's ministry yet who are not employed by the church. They are required to complete the children's ministry volunteer application, receive background checks, and review the CPP prior to serving. Volunteers include 3RG children's ministry teachers, teacher's assistants, hall monitors, nursery volunteers, all children's ministry coordinators, and anyone else who provides services to the children.

*Teenage volunteers.* These volunteers are minors who must be in at least 7th grade to help with the 2-4year olds and at least 9th grade to help with the 0-2 year olds. It is up to the discretion of the nursery coordinator to determine whether an interested teenager will be able to serve in the nursery.

*Leaders.* Elders and deacons are elected officers of the church. Those who serve in the children's ministry are required to complete the children's ministry volunteer application, receive background checks, and review the CPP prior to serving.

#### **5. Screening**

One major step to guarding children against predators is to screen and verify the backgrounds of the prospective child ministry worker. Having benchmarked various methods that churches have employed, 3RG may use the following components to screen child care workers: 1) a personal interview, 2) three state background checks as outlined below, 3) social media checks, and 4) non-family references. These screening steps are needed since we recognize that we live in a depraved world and thus need to confirm the information that workers provide. While we need, love, and do not wish to offend volunteers, protecting the children takes precedence.

## Background Checks

In Pennsylvania (PA), the state law (and thus 3RG) requires all volunteers who work with minors (children ages 17 and under) to obtain 3 background checks every 5 years:

- Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance (<https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home>);
- Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check (<https://epatch.state.pa.us/Home.jsp>);
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Criminal Background Fingerprinting check ([https://www.pa.cogentid.com//index\\_dpw.htm](https://www.pa.cogentid.com//index_dpw.htm)). 3RG requires this FBI fingerprint check regardless of whether the childcare worker is paid or unpaid.
- **If the volunteer has lived in the State of PA for 10 consecutive years**, he/she is not required to obtain the FBI check. They can simply print and sign this form: [http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/document/c\\_160267.pdf](http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/document/c_160267.pdf)
- **If the volunteer has not lived in the State of PA for 10 years**, the fingerprint-based FBI criminal background check is a multiple step process and may take a few weeks to get done. In general, it involves the volunteer registering online, and then going to a location for an appointment to get fingerprinting done. The volunteer then receives notice of findings by the FBI. For more information and to begin the registration process, go to [www.pa.cogentid.com//index\\_dpw.htm](http://www.pa.cogentid.com//index_dpw.htm). Should the volunteer be charged for this clearance, 3RG will reimburse the volunteer (up to \$ 30) by her/his filling out the 3RG reimbursement form and submitting it along with the receipt to the 3RG treasurer. See form: ([http://www.3riversgrace.org/uploads/9/1/7/3/9173131/reimbursement\\_form.pdf](http://www.3riversgrace.org/uploads/9/1/7/3/9173131/reimbursement_form.pdf))

To begin, one can start at the 3RG website under “Background Check Information”:  
<http://www.3riversgrace.org/documents.html>

## Record Retention

The volunteer should submit his/her paperwork for the clearances to the children’s ministry coordinator or 3RG’s designated representative in person or via email to be noted compliant.

Active background checks will be kept on file by designated 3RG representatives.

Status of volunteer’s background checks will be periodically summarized and reported to 3RG Elders and Deacons, Nursery, Sunday School, and other child-care ministry leaders so as to assure scheduled volunteers’ have current background checks.

It is the responsibility of volunteers to renew any and all background checks prior to their expiration or upon request of 3RG ministry leaders.

## 6. Classroom expectations

This section outlines the approaches 3RG uses to ensure there are safe, bible-based instruction and healthy fun and engaging activities in the children's ministry. In general, only a parent can be alone with a child at church or at church-related activities. Otherwise, the guidelines below should be followed.

*Volunteer Coverage.* It is preferred that at least two unrelated adults should be present at 3RG activities involving younger children. Should this not be possible, then minimally one adult and an unrelated teenager is required. As a precaution for instances when this is not the case, a hall monitor is available to check on classes periodically and to assist as needed.

- A. *Open spaces.* When children are in an open space (e.g., sanctuary, fellowship hall, kitchen), and other adults are generally present, a single focused adult caretaker is adequate.
- B. *Teen volunteers.* An exception to the two-adult rule is during special adult-focused events (e.g., small groups, business meetings, women's ministries, membership classes, outreach dinners, etc.). In these events, two teenage minors (i.e., ages 13 -17) are sufficient so long as adults who voluntarily drop off their children agree with the caretaking situations.
- C. *Other activities.* Other activities off-site from the church involving children (e.g., trips, service activities, etc.) that are not explicitly outlined in this CPP must have chaperon arrangements approved by an elder and a children's ministry coordinator.

*Adult-to-child ratio.* The following ratios for daycare services in the state of PA are a helpful standard for the regularly scheduled weekly 3RG services/meetings:

- Infant (birth to age 1): 1 adult for every 4 children
- Junior toddler (age 1 to age 2): 1 adult for every 5 children
- Senior Toddler (age 2 to age 3): 1 adult for every 6 children
- Pre-K (age 3 to age 5): 1 adult for every 10 children
- Primary (K to age 9): 1 adult for every 12 children
- Older children (age 9 to age 15): 1 adult for every 15 children

*Visibility.* 3RG classrooms and meeting rooms with children in them should always be open to visitors (i.e., parents, other volunteers, church leadership). However, adults which are not compliant with the 3RG screening and verification checks cannot interact with children, and if visiting, they do not count towards the aforementioned adult-to-student ratio. The doors with children in them should have windows and/or open Dutch doors for (nearly) full room visibility. Any areas of the classroom which are blind to outside viewers should be avoided by non-family adults and minors who are with children. Obstructions that reduce the viewing window for an outsider looking in the children's room should be mitigated.

*Hall monitor.* A hall monitor is an adult volunteer who roams the hallways looking for opportunities to provide support related to the children’s activities in the classroom or elsewhere in the church. These monitors may supplement the adult-to-child ratio as needed such as when children are being taken to the bathroom by another classroom adult.

### ***Food and Drink Policy***

Due to food allergies & sensitivities to peanuts and tree nuts, the nursery aims to maintain a nut-free snack environment. Parents are welcome to review the labels of snacks which 3RG provides for nut and other allergen ingredients. 3RG believes it is important for our nursery rooms to be a safe environment, and as much as possible, mitigate the risk associated with highly common allergens.

There should be a light snack time during each class. Children will be given a basic snack of Cheerios, graham crackers, goldfish crackers, or something similar, which is 3RG approved, along with water to drink.

Parents should write down any allergies or food restrictions on the sign in sheet each time the child is checked in. Additionally, first-time children to the 3RG children ministries should fill out a registration form and note the allergies and medical issues on it. This will be maintained in the children ministry’s records. Nonetheless, volunteers should always check the label before serving snacks to make sure they are nut free. Only snacks with a “3RG approved” label will be served to the children. Outside snacks from home should be discouraged unless there are specific needs.

## **7. Protective Rules & Safety Guidelines**

### ***Sickness and Wellness***

Child ministry volunteers, for the sake of all children and workers, should not allow parents to bring their child to nursery, Sunday School, or Children’s ministry related activities if he/she has:

- A fever or has had one in the past 24 hours
- Diarrhea or has had in the past 24 hours
- A fresh cold
- Nasal discharge unrelated to allergies
- A constant cough
- Nausea or vomiting in past 24 hours
- A rash on face or body
- Seems unusually tired or cranky
- Strep throat, if within first 24 hours

If a parent has questions, the final decision rests with the Nursery Coordinator or Elder.

### ***Check-in and Check-out process***

3RG strives to help create a safe, nurturing, and loving environment for children.

\*Parents should make sure their child is registered with the Children's Ministry. They should complete an information form for each child in their family who will be attending the children's ministry classes during church (i.e., Nursery: from birth to age 2; Toddler room: from age 2 to age 4).

\*For the age 0-2 nursery, parents should sign their child in on the sign-in sheet and indicate any dietary needs or preferences. All bottles, sippy cups, and diaper bags must be clearly labeled with the child's name.

\*For the toddlers, they should sign the child in on the sign-in sheet and indicate any dietary needs or preferences. For example, parents should mark on the sign-in form that their child wears diapers /pull ups or if they are potty trained. Provide your own diapers please.

\*For regularly attending kids in the age 2-4 room, there is a labeled container with their name on it and their name tag in it. Parents should put the child's personal items (e.g., cups, jackets) in the container and clip their nametag on their upper back so that the teaching team can know his/her name.

\*Only parents or authorized adults are allowed to drop-off and pick up children. Older siblings are not permitted to pick up a child. In addition, parent or authorized adult MUST be present and in the building while the child or children are in the care of 3RG church.

\*If necessary, parents are encouraged to use discretion when checking on the child during the session. In some cases, it may be more upsetting to the children than helpful and can be very disruptive. Parents are allowed to look in the window to check on their child. If a child has an emergency or cries longer than 5-10 minutes, a parent will be notified.

### ***Restroom Procedure***

In both nurseries infants and toddlers will have their diapers changed only by women in the nursery on the designated changing table.

Children in the 2-4 year old room should be taken to the bathroom periodically by a woman. More than one child should be taken, and hall monitors should be called upon whenever possible.

### ***Transportation and Off-site Event Guidelines***

As of July 2016, Pennsylvania does not require a chauffeur's license. However, the 3RG volunteer who is driving the children must have a valid driver's license and consent from the parents. The driver is a 3RG volunteer so she / he must also have his appropriate clearances completed.

### ***Neglect and abuse prevention plan***

If neglect or abuse is believed to be occurring, the adult volunteer should take appropriate steps to assess if this is true.

According to the book *On Guard* by Deepak Reju, there are four unhelpful assumptions that cause Christians to operate in ignorance:

- 1) *It will never happen to us.* Christians should recognize that while they are to pray for protection of their children by God, they should not be naïve, knowing that the church exists within a fallen world where there are sinful and unregenerate people entering the church doors.
- 2) *Sexual perpetrators are monsters, and not like us.* In actuality, people must recognize that sexual predators live a 'double life' in order to fool people into letting down their guards. Since Christians aim to go out of their way to show people the love as Jesus Christ did, it makes them particularly vulnerable to those who aim to exploit this wonderful attitude that Christians aim to display to people who are broken and in need of God's love.
- 3) *We know the people in our church.* Church, especially small churches like 3RG, often declare that they know the people who are members and regular attendees of their church. Keeping in mind that sexual predators of children fight to gain the trust of people in order to get access to their kids to fulfil their own sinful desires, the church must defer to protective principles over external assumptions about people. Further, child predators are savvy risk-takers who trust their ability to coax people and give excuses on the fly (e.g., "I just had my hand up the back of the child's shirt to feel for chicken pox."). With the CPP in place, a volunteer can more easily cite a regulation violation to the well-meaning adult or recognize potential abusive type behavior when it occurs.

This CPP has outlined principles to screen and verify the volunteers based on their past behaviors since they will have access to children. Thus, these guidelines should be followed. For example, many churches have several biologically connected families in them. Therefore, the CPP guidelines, which states two adults who are related should not be working together unless a 3<sup>rd</sup> adult is present, help to guard against potential abuse incidents.

- 4) *Our church is safe for our kids.* Church members assume that other churches may or may not have abuse concerns, but their own church does not. The intuition of people should defer to sound policies such as those outlined in this CPP. For example, screening volunteers may identify a person with a checkered past regarding abuse. While this person



may be repentant and show the fruit of repentance, they should accept that they are not allowed to work with children in 3RG so that the church's reputation is maintained and so that parents do not have the burden of worrying about the care of their children. Further, the rules outlined in this CPP recognize that the probable sex offenders of children are first male (single and then married) and then women. Thus, guidelines are not meant to be sexist; they are meant to reflect a wise response to the statistics and to the nature of men and women.

### ***Reporting and response plan for child neglect and abuse***

*Who is a Mandatory reporter?* Every adult volunteer in the children's ministry is considered a mandatory reporter by the state of Pennsylvania (PA). This means that if a volunteer sees an incident of child abuse, he / she can use the PA state ChildLine to call trained professionals to initiate a thoughtful investigation. The State of Pennsylvania maintains a phone number, the ChildLine (**800-932-0313**), which is available to volunteers 7 days per week and 24 hours per day, for reporting instances of abuse and neglect where the abuse is discovered as a past or present incident.

### ***General signs of abuse***

Recognizing that a child will likely feel guilt or shame about abuse and thus not disclose it, the following are signs of child abuse (modified from the Mayo Clinic guidelines for a church environment):

- Withdrawal from friends or usual activities
- Changes in behavior
- Depression, anxiety or unusual fears or a sudden loss of self-confidence
- An apparent lack of supervision
- Attempts at running away
- Attempts at suicide

### ***Physical abuse signs and symptoms***

- Unexplained injuries, such as bruises, fractures or burns
- Injuries that don't match the given explanation
- Untreated medical or dental problems

### ***Sexual abuse signs and symptoms***

- Sexual behavior or knowledge that's inappropriate for the child's age
- Blood in the child's underwear
- Statements that he or she was sexually abused

- Trouble walking or sitting or complaints of genital pain
- Abuse of other children sexually

*Parental behavior* (when they are fostering abuse)

- Shows little concern for the child
- Appears unable to recognize physical or emotional distress in the child
- Offers conflicting, weak, or no explanations for a child's injuries

***How can abuse be reported, and what action will be taken?***

To report suspected abuse in PA, call the ChildLine: **800-932-0313**:

NOTE: The ChildLine does not take the call and immediately remove the child from the home. Professionals will initiate a thoughtful investigation to see if the child's situation warrants concern. Therefore, the mandatory reporter should not think that if he or she reports abuse, the child will be automatically removed from the parents without proper confirmation following an investigation.

*Mandatory reporter training.* It is advised that volunteers take the mandatory reporter training. For PA, the University of Pittsburgh's, Child Welfare Resource Center has developed a free, web-based training for mandatory (and permissive) reporters here: [www.reportabusepa.pitt.edu](http://www.reportabusepa.pitt.edu) .

Since this training educates volunteers on understanding and discovering child abuse, the church recommends they take the free, online, training and provide the evidence of completion to the children's ministry coordinator or 3RG's designated representative for retaining records. This can be added to the individual's file along with their clearances.

Most people profile sexual abusers based on stereotypes and incorrect knowledge. This puts some populations (e.g., minority and poor demographics) in a vulnerable position to be more highly reported. Therefore, it is best to replace any well-intended ignorance with accurate knowledge.

**Guidelines for handling sexual offenders who regularly attend or join church**

If a sexual offender wants to attend or join the church, the Elders should be notified. The church should be notified through a church meeting where the situation can be put into proper context without false rumors and gossip. The sexual offender should provide the elders and the child protection committee with the following information: (i) the name of the probation officer, (ii) the specific terms of the probation to ensure compliance is maintained, (iii) a verbal and/or written commitment to not interact with children (without the parent being present) or the children's activities. Even if repentant, the perpetrator should be willing to do what he can to comply with

the law and ensure that others are warned. The nature of sexual abuse necessitates that the offender seeks transparency and accountability.

*A duty to warn policy.* The appropriate authorities, community leaders/officers, or residents should be notified if a sexual perpetrator regularly attends the church, especially if the person resides in the community. For example, the church should ensure that the perpetrators are registered offenders and in compliance with the law. No one person makes the decisions on these matters; various committees (e.g., the CPP team, Deacons, Elders, and/or Children's Ministry, etc.) rule and act in these matters.

## References

(The church-related and government resources below were critical assets in helping our church develop its own CPP.)

1. Deepak Reju, *On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church*, New Growth Press, 2014.
2. Safe Sanctuaries Policy, Providence Church (in New Providence, PA),  
[http://www.provchurch.net/files/safe\\_sanctuaries\\_policy\\_final.pdf](http://www.provchurch.net/files/safe_sanctuaries_policy_final.pdf)
3. Child Protection Policy, Capitol Hill Baptist Church,  
<http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/ministries/children/child-protection-policy/>
4. Child Protection Policy, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church,  
<http://www.gslutheran.net/#/welcome/child-protection-policy>
5. Child Protection Policy (Basic Training), Sojourn Community Church , Available at:  
<http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/ministries/children/child-protection-policy/>
6. Child Protection Policy (Training Checklist), Sojourn Community Church , Available at:  
<http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/ministries/children/child-protection-policy/>
7. Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Shepherd Press, 1995
8. Child Abuse Symptoms, The Mayo Clinic, <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/child-abuse/basics/symptoms/con-20033789>

**Contributors to working draft:** C. Fred Higgs III (Draft 1, July 2016), Ben Reaoch (Draft 2, December 2016), minor edits September 2019