



VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

*A Volunteer Guide for the oversight of children and youth
at Covenant Life Church. Revised 6/10/2024*

OUR MISSION

*Worship God. Love one another.
Make disciples of Jesus Christ.*

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I. CHILD PROTECTION POLICY FOR COVENANT LIFE CHURCH

This handbook covers vital aspects of CLC's Child Protection Policy (CPP) and Children's Ministry Procedures and Practices. While much of the handbook is specific to the Children's Ministry, the CPP is applicable to any CLC ministry involving oversight of a minor (children under age 18). The principles of child protection, care, and reporting of potential neglect and abuse are applicable to all ministries regardless of context. If you have any questions about these policies and your role as a volunteer in another ministry, please contact the appropriate overseeing pastor.

II. VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES

Thank you for volunteering to serve children or youth at CLC. Your commitment to care for the next generation is a vital part of church life. As a volunteer, you play a critical role in ensuring that children receive the best possible care while participating in Children's Ministry classes or in other CLC ministry activities. Because we take child protection seriously, all volunteers must adhere to the following rules and procedures. All volunteers sign an agreement to abide by the following procedures along with other important aspects of child safety.

A. Annual Volunteer Application, Training, and Approval

Every adult (age 18 and over) completes the Volunteer Application and consents to a background check. We also consult the National Sex Offender Public Website and Maryland Judiciary Case Search. Applicants may be interviewed as part of the process. Every adult volunteer must complete training in abuse awareness and training in their ministry area of service. Youth helpers (age 11-17) complete the volunteer application along with a parent. Youth helpers receive training from other adult volunteers on the days in which they serve. Applications are kept secure by the Children's Ministry staff.

B. Two-Adult Rule

At all times, there must be a minimum of Two Approved Adult Volunteers (age 18 and older) in every classroom or any other context on the church premises where children are located in a ministry context. Volunteers are to maintain a line of sight with one another at all times. There are no exceptions to this rule! Volunteers should alert leadership for any lack of adherence to this rule.

C. Door Security

For the safety of children and volunteers, all exterior doors are monitored and opened only by appropriate team members. Volunteers should not open or leave outer doors of the building propped open. During the week, entry is controlled by CLC security staff.

D. Mandatory Reporting of Potential Child Abuse and Neglect

A vital aspect in caring for children is understanding what to do if you believe a child is at risk of harm. Any suspected abuse or neglect must be reported immediately to legal authorities in accordance with Maryland state laws. CLC believes that it is the moral responsibility of every CLC employee and volunteer to report to local law enforcement authorities if there is reason to believe that child abuse or neglect has occurred.*

***Important note:** In Maryland, the legal standard for reporting potential abuse or neglect is "reason to believe" - not just "suspicion". As a practical guideline, a "reason to believe" should be a sign that is objectively observable (not just intuition or "a gut feeling") which can be rationally explained to a third party and supported by the type of evidence that is indicative of abuse.

Volunteers should exercise sound judgment in reporting potential child abuse or neglect. If a volunteer has reason to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect, that volunteer must immediately follow a two-step reporting process:

Step 1: Report to the local department of social services or to a local law enforcement agency and,

Step 2: Report to the Children's Ministry Director. If the director is not available, the report must be given to a CLC pastor.

CLC hires police security for all Sunday morning services and various other events. CLC has received assurance from local law enforcement departments that volunteers can accomplish Step 1 by reporting directly to any of the sworn law enforcement officers on duty at CLC. An officer is usually available in the main church lobby. If a law enforcement officer is not available at that time, the volunteer must contact the Montgomery County Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at **240-777-4417** or the non-emergency Montgomery County Police line at **301-279-8000**. Proof of abuse or neglect is not required to report.

When reporting reasonable belief about abuse or neglect to the local law enforcement officer on duty at CLC and the Children's Ministry director, volunteers should state the following to the *extent of their knowledge*:

1. Name, age, and home address of the child
2. Name and home address of the child's parents or person responsible for the child's care
3. Whereabouts of the child
4. Nature and extent of any potential abuse or neglect of the child, including any evidence of information available to the reporter concerning possible previous instances of potential abuse or neglect
5. Any other information that would help determine (a) the cause of the potential abuse or neglect and (b) the identity of any individual responsible for the potential abuse or neglect

To protect children even further, CLC requires volunteers to report any suspicion whatsoever of child abuse or neglect to the Children's Ministry Director (Step 2) even if the suspicion does not rise to the level of state-mandated reporting based on the "reason to believe" standard.

Reporting observations is one way to provide a safe environment for children and youth. Law enforcement agencies are equipped to respond and we are grateful to partner with them.

The below information is taken from Maryland's Department of Human Services website.

Reporting child abuse and neglect is everyone's responsibility. Children need us to pay attention to some of the common signs of possible child abuse or neglect. If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, please call the local department of social services in your area.

Potential Signs of Physical Abuse

A child who exhibits any of the following signs may be a victim of physical abuse:

- Has unexplained injuries/marks, such as burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Is reluctant to explain injuries after returning home from being in someone else's care
- Seems scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn, or aggressive

- Seems frightened of a parent or parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Shrinks at the approach of adults
- Shows unusual changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Reports injury or abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Abuses animals or pets

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when a parent or other caregiver:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for a child's injury or provides an explanation that is inconsistent with an injury
- Shows little concern for a child or a child's injuries
- Sees a child as entirely bad, burdensome, or worthless
- Uses harsh physical discipline with a child
- Has a history of abusing animals or pets

Potential Signs of Neglect

A child who exhibits the following signs may be a victim of neglect:

- Is frequently absent from school
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical care, including dental or vision care
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care

Consider the possibility of neglect when a parent or other caregiver:

- Appears to be indifferent to a child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- Repeatedly leaves younger children outside or alone with no visible caregiver

Potential Signs of Sexual Abuse

A child who exhibits any of the following signs may be a victim of sexual abuse:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Experiences bleeding, bruising, or swelling in the genital area
- Suddenly refuses to go to school
- Reports nightmares or wets the bed
- Engages in self-harm, including cutting, burning, or otherwise hurting his or herself
- Has a sudden change in appetite or shows signs of an eating disorder
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior or displays inappropriate sexual behavior with other children or adults
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a sexually transmitted disease, particularly if under age 14
- Runs away
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Attaches very quickly to strangers or new adults in their environment

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when a parent or other caregiver:

- Tries to be a child's friend rather than maintaining an appropriate adult role
- Repeatedly compliments the child's physical appearance or requests pictures inappropriate to the adult's role
- Flatters the child into thinking that their relationship is a secret or romantic
- Makes up excuses to be alone with a child
- Talks with a child about the adult's personal problems or relationships
- Exposes a child to inappropriate media of a sexual nature, including pornography

Potential Signs of Mental Injury

A child who exhibits the following signs may be a victim of mental injury:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as being overly compliant or demanding, extremely passive, or aggressive
- Either inappropriately assumes the role of an adult in the home (e.g., parents or protects other children), acts inappropriately infantile, or engages in self-harm, including display of repetitive behaviors such as rocking or head-banging
- Does not seem to be attached to the parent/caregiver
- Demonstrates a noticeable decline in cognitive abilities or self care

Consider the possibility of mental injury when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child
- Describes the child negatively
- Overtly rejects the child
- Excessively takes an apparently healthy child for medical appointments with different doctors or experts, seemingly rejecting the advice of medical professionals

If you suspect a child is being harmed, reporting your suspicions may protect the child and help the family receive assistance. Any concerned person can report a suspicion of child abuse or neglect. Reporting your concerns is not making an accusation; rather, it is a request for an investigation or assessment to determine if help is needed. You do not need actual proof of child abuse or neglect; it is the responsibility of the local department of social services to determine if abuse or neglect occurred. You have the absolute right to remain anonymous as a reporter.

You can find the number to make a report at the following link:

<https://dhs.maryland.gov/blog/child-protective-services/reporting-suspected-child-abuse-or-neglect/local-offices/>

III. CHILDREN'S MINISTRY PROCEDURES

If you are serving in the Children's Ministry on Sundays, thank you for choosing to invest in the youngest generation at Covenant Life Church. We are thrilled to have you on the team! Please familiarize yourself with the Children's Ministry procedure and practices below. You have a vital role as a volunteer. For questions, please contact us at CovLifeKids@covlife.org

A. Emergency Procedures

All volunteers should familiarize themselves with all emergency procedure documents which are located in each classroom's wall-mounted bin or binder and follow the instructions in the event of an emergency. Included in these documents are: *Procedures for Emergency Evacuation, Lockdown, Tornado, Earthquake, Lost Child, Choking Child, and a Child Protective Service Abuse/Neglect Fact Sheet.*

If a child is choking or needs CPR, call 911, alert the CLC Medical team and refer to the related wall posters in the classroom. **Please review these frequently so that you will be prepared in the event of an emergency.** If a classroom does not have all of these documents, alert your coordinator or the Children's Ministry Director.

B. Cell Phone Use

Children must never be given or shown a volunteer's cell phone or other device. Adult Volunteers may use cell phones to contact parents or if they need assistance. Other use of cell phones is strongly discouraged when serving in the Children's Ministry.

C. Child Bathroom Needs

1. The Two-Adult Volunteer Rule must be in effect at all times. Parents sitting in class with their child are not considered “volunteers”.
2. Parents serving as volunteers in their child’s room should still abide by the Two-Adult Rule when assisting their own child with bathroom needs during class. This communicates the importance of the Two-Adult Rule to everyone.
3. Only Female Adult Volunteers are allowed to change diapers.
4. If a potty-training child has an accident, the volunteer should text parents. .
5. If a pre-school child bathroom need arises, Two Female Adult Volunteers will accompany the child to the bathroom. In order to achieve the Two-Adult Rule at all times, assistance from the coordinator or other nearby approved volunteers may be needed (ie: Two Adult Female Volunteers take the child to the bathroom while the coordinator and other adult volunteer stay with the class.).
6. Outer bathroom doors must always be propped open during bathroom breaks. Volunteers must ensure bathrooms are not in use by others before or during Children's Ministry use.
7. Female Adult Volunteers supervise male & female children up through age 5.
8. Unless a child is in urgent need, volunteers should not go inside a bathroom stall with any child. If a child needs help, an adult volunteer should help while another adult volunteer stands in view.
9. If needed, Female Adult Volunteers may help a child (up to 3 years old) sit on the toilet. This will be done in view of the second adult volunteer. Parents should be texted for any older children needing assistance.
10. If needed, Female Adult Volunteers may help a child (up to 4 years old) with their clothing (ie: zipping, buttoning, pulling up pants). This will be done in view of the second adult volunteer. Parents should be texted for any older children needing assistance.
11. Volunteers must never touch a child’s private areas. Volunteers must never help a male child “aim” while urinating. If the boy needs help with this, text the parents.
12. Volunteers must never help a child wipe. If a child needs assistance with this, text the parents.

D. Child Discipline Issues

If a child is misbehaving, volunteers must speak in a calm and gracious manner. Volunteers may never use any form of physical or emotional means of adjusting a child’s behavior - including physically removing an unwilling child, spanking, or withholding snacks. Any behavior that cannot be easily addressed by a gracious and verbal appeal must involve a coordinator. If the child continues to be unwilling, the volunteer or coordinator alerts the parents. Do not wait until the end of class if a child will not respond to the appeal. Volunteers should directly communicate to parents on issues regarding a child’s behavior.

E. Parents Staying with Their Children in Classrooms

A parent who is not an approved volunteer may remain in class with their child. To identify the parent as a classroom visitor, parents will be asked to wear a visitor name tag provided by the coordinator. The visiting parent may only act as a caretaker of their own child.

F. Safety/Security Team

On Sunday mornings, the Safety/Security Team monitors the hallways of the Children’s Ministry classrooms and enforces controlled access. They also report any suspicious activity or emergency situations to the police officers on duty. At any time, you can request a Safety/Security Team member to assist in these matters. They are not authorized to receive abuse reports, but they can assist in locating the police or Children’s Ministry Director.

G. Sickness

Sick children, including those with clear runny noses and coughs, are not allowed in Children's Ministry classes or the Video Room. Sick volunteers should notify their coordinator and email their volunteer group to obtain a sub if possible.

H. Video & Photography of Children

We require that volunteers NEVER videotape or photograph children while serving in the Children's Ministry. CLC staff may videotape and photograph as directed by the Children's Ministry Director. See posted signs on church door entrances for more information.

I. Volunteer Name Tags

Volunteers must wear a name tag produced from the check-in stations located in the main lobby. This tag demonstrates that you have met the training requirements and are approved to work with children at CLC. If you have questions or trouble checking in, visit the Kids Help Desk located near the Check-In Stations. No one is allowed in a classroom without a name tag. Each child, youth helper, and adult volunteer must wear a tag.

J. Youth Helpers (Children of Members)

Youth Helpers (ages 11-17), who are children of members, may serve without one of their own parents present in the classroom. Male youth helpers are not permitted to serve in the Nursery without an approved parent volunteer also serving in that room. Youth Helpers may not serve in the Infant Care Room or on the Safety/Security Team.

Note: The Two-Adult Rule is in effect, without exception, in all Children's Ministry contexts. Please see the related section in this handbook.

IV. CHILDREN'S MINISTRY PRACTICES

A. Volunteer Arrival

Please arrive 15 minutes prior to the start of class. If you are late, you may miss important announcements and time to pray. Classrooms may not be adequately staffed - resulting in classroom closure. Please be on time. We understand that life happens and when it does, please contact your coordinator.

B. Substitute Policy

Please find a sub when you are sick or not able to serve. To request a sub, please email your volunteer group and your coordinator.

1. Once approved to volunteer, you will be part of an email group for volunteers. This group is designed for you to more easily find a substitute when you can not serve.
2. If you have questions about the email group, please contact the Children's Ministry staff at CovLifeKids@covlife.org.

C. Child Check-in & Drop-off to Classroom

After a child has been checked in at the Check-in Station in the Main Lobby, parents/guardians place the name tag on the child's shirt and escort them to their classrooms. At the classroom check-in, Volunteers:

1. Warmly GREET the family.

2. CONFIRM child's name, parent's cell number, and classroom location on the child's name tag.
3. Note any allergies that are listed on the child's name tag. If allergy is not pre-printed on tag, parents can resolve this at the Kids Help Desk. Direct parents to the Children's Ministry Director for any classroom issues relating to allergies.
4. CHECK IN the child's arrival on the classroom's paper roster under.

D. Child Pick-up from Classroom

Volunteers may release a child from Children's Ministry ONLY when the parent or approved person presents a Pick-up Slip/Sticker that MATCHES THE SECURITY CODE on the child's sticker. There are NO exceptions to this rule - not even if the volunteer knows the person picking up the child. This policy is for the child's safety and the volunteer's protection. Adherence to this policy is critical. Once verified, volunteers CHECK OUT the child on the classroom's paper roster.

1. **Child's Lost Name Tag** If a child loses his/her name tag, a volunteer alerts the coordinator. The coordinator alerts the parent/guardian and informs them to seek assistance from the Kids Help Desk to retrieve a new name tag before picking up their child. This is necessary as the child's security code will change when printing the new name tag.
2. **Parent's Lost Pick-up Slip/Sticker** If a parent loses his/her pick-up slip, the parent must seek assistance from the Kids Help Desk in order to receive a new pick-up slip. A parent cannot use a driver's license to pick up their child.

E. Cleanliness

To keep things looking clean and clear to members and visitors dropping off their children to our care, Volunteers & Youth Helpers should WASH HANDS before serving, WEAR A COVLIFE KIDS T-SHIRT or smock, and WEAR A NAME TAG.

Before departing, volunteers and helpers should:

1. Turn off media devices.
2. Sanitize toys and return to proper locations.
3. Empty diaper pail, replace liner, and place trash into the trash can in Room 225 (Supply Closet).
4. Return baby gates to Room 225.
5. Put smocks and dirty rags in the laundry basket located in Room 225.
6. Report damage or dirtiness that cannot be fixed on the paper check-in roster.
7. Seal and re-store all food items; empty and dry out water pitcher.

F. Food

Volunteers must consult with the Children's Ministry Director before bringing treats for the children.

V. CHILDREN'S MINISTRY MEDICAL & TRAUMA PROCEDURES

For serious emergencies, IMMEDIATELY CALL 911. And then follow the guidelines below.

A. Alert Medical Team, Child's Parent, and Coordinator if there is any:

1. Symptoms detailed in the Head Trauma Policy (see below)
2. Bleeding
3. Injury
4. Suspected seizure activity
5. Allergic reaction
6. Wheezing or trouble breathing

7. Chest pressure or pain
8. Nausea
9. Vomiting
10. Fever
11. Non-stop crying

B. Head Trauma Policy (Alert Medical Team, Child's Parent, and Coordinator)

1. Child bumped head
2. Seizure or convulsion occurred
3. Unconscious for any period of time
4. Not moving neck normally
5. Difficult to awaken
6. Confused thinking, slurred speech, unsteady walking, arm/leg weakness
7. Bleeding
8. Neck pain
9. Chest pain
10. Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
11. Blurred vision
12. Swelling occurs
13. Dent in skull
14. Injury from a height or blow from hard object
15. Vomiting
16. Watery fluid dripping from the nose or ear
17. Headache or crying
18. Can't remember what happened

Note: Err on the side of caution when alerting the CLC Medical Team and the child's parents.

VI. FAQs

A. Who serves on fifth-week Sundays?

Week 1 Team serves on the FIRST 5th Sunday of the year.
 Week 2 Team serves on the SECOND 5th Sunday of the year.
 Week 3 Team serves on the THIRD 5th Sunday of the year.
 Week 4 Team serves on the FOURTH 5th Sunday of the year.

B. Why do we need the Two-Adult Rule? This is a wisdom rule that helps avoid any opportunity for abuse. This rule helps protect volunteers from false allegations of abuse. Volunteers must always follow this policy.

C. Where are children taken in the event of an emergency?

Children are taken to the church's back lawn. Parents can pick up their children on the lawn as long as they have a matching pick-up sticker. In the event of an emergency, volunteers should refer to the emergency procedure documents located on the wall near their classroom's door and in their classroom binder.

D. What should I do if I don't know how to handle a situation? Ask the Coordinator.

E. How do I respond to a shelter in place situation? Refer to emergency procedure documents located on the wall near the classroom door or in the classroom binder.