

Children's Ministry Policy Manual

At First Denton we take our responsibility to care for children very seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which children can grow in relationship with Jesus Christ.

The pages of this policy handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guidelines for volunteers and staff members. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for children, protecting children, you, and the mission of First Denton. The following policies/procedures/guidelines have been adopted and will be diligently enforced.

After you have carefully read this policy manual, please sign and return the agreement form located on the last page. Thank you for partnering with us in this critical aspect of ministry.

Sincerely,

First Denton Leadership

Safety Policies & Procedures for Student Ministry

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Overview of First Denton Safety System

Because we care for students and desire to protect them, First Denton requires all staff members and volunteers working with children or students to complete **FOUR SAFETY STEPS** before ministry work or volunteer placement begins.

Step 1: Screening Process

Staff members and volunteers working or serving with children are required to complete First Denton's Screening Process, which includes:

- an Employment Application (employees only)
- a Safety Application (employees and volunteers)
- a face-to-face interview (employees and volunteers)
- references to be checked (employees and volunteers)

****A volunteer must attend First Denton for six months before being eligible to serve in positions providing ministry services to children. Exceptions may be granted by the Safety Team for new members transferring by letter or individuals who are active members of other local churches. These exceptions will be considered on a case by case basis and will require that in their references they have at least one called minister from their home church. This reference should have personal knowledge of the individual's work with children in a church setting for a period longer than six months.***

Step 2: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

First Denton policies and procedures require that staff members and volunteers avoid abusive behavior of any kind. Staff members and volunteers are required to report any policy violations to a supervisor or a member of the First Denton Safety Team. Staff members and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in 'grooming' a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, win

the child's trust (and the trust of the child's parent or 'gatekeeper'), manipulate the child into sexual activity and keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

To equip staff members and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, **First Denton requires all staff members and volunteers to complete sexual abuse awareness training.** This training will be renewed every two years.

Step 3: Policies & Procedures

Staff members and volunteers are required to review the policies contained in this manual and sign the last page indicating that he or she has read and understood the material and agrees to comply with policy requirements.

Step 4: Criminal Background Check

First Denton requires that all staff members and volunteers working or volunteering in children's activities undergo a criminal background check. Depending upon the ministry position, differing levels or intensity of criminal background check may be required.

Child Safety Policy

Abuse Tolerance

First Denton has a **zero tolerance for abuse** in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer at First Denton to act in the best interest of all children in every program.

In the event a staff member or volunteer observes any inappropriate behaviors (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse or neglect (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is that individual's

responsibility to immediately report their observations to an immediate supervisor and the Children’s Minister or the Executive Pastor/Business Administrator.

Reporting Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors

First Denton is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse or neglect will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to Child Protective Services, or another appropriate agency.

Because sexual abusers ‘groom’ children for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to ‘groom’ a child for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are asked to report ‘grooming’ behavior, policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to an immediate supervisor and the Children’s Minister or the Executive Pastor/Business Administrator.

Enforcement of Policies

First Denton staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff members or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all Church policies. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment from Children’s Ministry positions for both volunteers and staff members. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the Executive Pastor/Business Administrator and the Personnel Committee.

Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse

Reporting Violation of Policy

All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to an immediate supervisor in the ministry area, the Student's Minister, and/or the Executive Pastor/Business Administrator.

Consequences of Violation

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child will be immediately suspended from participation in Children's Ministry. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or Child Protective agencies.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act may be prohibited from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming that involves children, students or vulnerable populations at First Denton. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment from First Denton.

Failure to report a policy violation is grounds for termination of an employee. Volunteers who fail to report a policy violation may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children or students at First Denton.

REPORTING SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES
FIRST DENTON'S POLICY IS TO REPORT **ALL** SUSPICIONS OR ALLEGATIONS OF
ABUSE, REGARDLESS OF STATE LAW REQUIREMENTS.

WHEN IN DOUBT, REPORT!

Response to Report of Abuse

First Denton Leadership will take appropriate action on behalf of the church when a report of abuse occurs. At a minimum, when a report is made to a supervisor,

both parties go directly to the Student's Minister to communicate the allegations. The Student's Minister will evaluate the urgency of the circumstances using the Texas Department of Family and Protective services guidelines as communicated on their website. Urgent situations will be reported immediately using 911 and then the Texas Abuse Hotline. Less urgent situations will be reported using the online form available at <https://www.txabusehotline.org>. No matter the level of urgency, the person reporting the abuse will work with the Student's Minister to complete the online form for internal tracking purposes. This report will then be used to document and track the progress of the formal report and to communicate decision points and information to the First Denton Safety Team. Ultimately, every report, regardless of the outcome, must be reported to the First Denton Safety Team for approval of response, next steps and resolution.

First Denton Safety Team

Safety Team

Recognizing the importance of providing and maintaining a safe environment for children, First Denton will maintain a Safety Team, which will meet once each quarter.

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Safety Team is to enable First Denton Children's and Student Ministries to carry out appropriate ministry activities while safeguarding program participants against emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

Composition

The Safety Team will be comprised of the following staff and church members:

1. Executive Pastor
2. Business Administrator
3. Children's Minister (or their designee),
4. Student Minister (or their designee),
5. University Minister (or their designee),
6. Community Coordinator,
7. A designated member of the facilities department.

Meetings

The Business Administrator will chair the meeting of the Safety Team on a quarterly basis to discuss risk management practices and updates. The Safety Team will also meet on an emergency basis upon the recommendation of a member or following the report of any incident or allegation.

Responsibilities

The Safety Team will be charged with the following duties:

1. Applying existing First Denton policies and procedures related to student's safety and risk management issues.
2. Monitoring all ministry programs for children/students under the age of 18 to ensure ongoing compliance with safety policies.
3. Making recommendations to the First Denton congregation regarding safety issues.
4. Making recommendations to First Denton leadership regarding response to and care of victims of abuse.
5. Effectively communicating with the appropriate internal parties regarding safety issues. Examples of internal parties who might receive reports from this group would be the Senior Pastor, Pastoral Staff, Church Council, Deacons, Personnel Committee, etc.

The Safety Team is not responsible for communicating with external media sources. Only the Senior Pastor is authorized to communicate directly with media and then only after having consulted legal counsel.

Children's Ministry Staff Monitoring Plan

Monitoring of staff and volunteers will include regular (announced and unannounced) visits in each program to provide supervisors the opportunity to observe staff member and volunteer interactions with students.

1. **Each supervisor** (of employees or volunteers) conducts an unscheduled observation at least once each month for programs that occur once a week.
2. **Student's Minister** conducts written performance evaluations every twelve months for individuals in paid staff positions.
3. **Student's Minister** conducts periodic verbal performance evaluations of staff and volunteers that address participation in risk management training and adherence to risk management procedures.
4. **Executive Pastor (or his designee)** conducts an unscheduled observation of a Student's Ministry program at least once each quarter.
5. **Church Council** meets with the Student's Minister once each year to discuss the ministry, including safety training and procedures.

Building Safety

The Children's Minister or their designee will be responsible for ensuring that the Children's Building is monitored during Sunday classes or programming. This will include monitoring of staff members, volunteers and children in children's classrooms.

No child will ever be left unattended in the Children's Building or on the children's playground during children's ministry programming or classes. Children's Ministry staff members or volunteers are prohibited from being alone with an individual child in any room or building. In the event a staff member or volunteer finds himself/herself alone with a single child, that staff member or volunteer will take the child to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: if a child is the last in a class to be picked up by a parent, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present.)

After every programming event, Children's Ministry staff members and volunteers must ensure every room and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

On the children's playground, staff members and volunteers are to circulate, watching children during play periods, giving particular attention to the areas not easily seen from all viewpoints. (Example: under slides, in corners, behind structures).

Any two children together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area of the playground.

Children’s Worker to Student Ratio

First Denton is committed to providing adequate supervision in all Children’s Ministries programs. Accordingly, the following worker to child **minimum ratios** will be observed:

Program	Workers	Children
Nursery	2	8
Preschool, 2 and 3 years old	2	12
Preschool, 4 and 5 years old	2	18
Elementary	2	20
VBS	2	20

If a worker is ‘out of ratio’ it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify the program supervisor or the Children’s Minister. Supervisors will make diligent efforts to find substitute workers to immediately bring worker to children ratios into compliance with the levels above. An individual is considered a “worker” in this ratio only if they are over the age of 18. Minors who are helping or assisting in the classroom or with a specific program are considered “children” in the ratio even if they are not the recipient of the ministry programming. Their role is to provide energy and excitement, assist the adult leaders as necessary and most importantly, to learn how to be an effective volunteer leader. They are not responsible for abuse awareness, emergency response, discipline, etc. and will not be counted in the ratio as a “worker”.

Discipline

It is our policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children. **No form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, biting or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. Children are to be disciplined using time-outs and other non-physical methods of behavior management. In employing this procedure, staff members and volunteers should observe the following guidelines:

- 1) Verbally redirect the child before physically intervening. With younger children some physical redirection may be necessary (for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child that is hitting another).
- 2) If the behavior does not cease, remove or direct the child away from the group to a corner of the room where the group is meeting (avoid being alone with the child).
- 3) Provide the child with a simple, understandable reason for the time-out, and provide the child with clear explanation of your expectations. (“Jamie, you didn’t stop hitting Chris when I asked you to, so you need to sit quietly in the blue chair for three minutes.”) In addition, be verbally reassuring, as being removed from the group will likely upset the child. Do not physically hold a child in time-out.
- 4) Provide the child with a chair to sit in or a “spot” to sit on (using a pillow, blanket, carpet square, etc.) until their time-out is complete.
- 5) Follow the rule of thumb that a time-out is ineffective if it lasts longer than one minute for every year of the child’s life (3 years old, 3 minutes).
- 6) Monitor the child through the entire time-out without giving your undivided attention. For longer time-outs give intermittent praise to reassure the child and keep them on task. (“Jamie, you’re doing a great job of sitting quietly – just 2 more minutes.”)
- 7) Praise the child once he or she has completed the time-out and tell them that their reward is being able to rejoin the group. Remind them that repeating their initial behavior will result in further time-out. Follow this with praise.

Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and the Children’s Minister.

BATHROOM SUPERVISION AND ASSISTANCE GUIDELINE

Nursery Children

Because nursery children may require complete assistance with their bathroom activities, all staff members and volunteers will observe the following policies:

Diapering

1. Only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will undertake the diapering of children of either sex.
2. Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of other nursery workers.
3. Appropriate steps to change a diaper must be followed. Those steps are:
 - a. Put on gloves (new gloves required for every child and each diaper change);
 - b. Cover the diaper changing surface with disposable liner;
 - c. Change the soiled diaper;
 - d. Remove liner from changing surface and discard in trash can. Wipe any visible soil with damp paper towel, or baby wipe and dispose of all materials including gloves;
 - e. Wet entire surface with disinfectant; make sure to follow directions on disinfectant;
 - f. Wash child's hands and your hands;
 - g. Repeat these steps for each child
4. Children will never be left unattended on changing tables.
5. Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in nursery will be recorded on the registration cards ("Seth Adams has a medicine in the bag for rash.")
6. Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.
7. Children should be changed on changing stations only.

Toilet Training

1. No child will be forced to toilet train.
2. Only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will participate in toilet training efforts with children of either sex.
3. When children are taken into bathrooms the door will be left partially open.
4. Young children will never be left unattended in bathrooms.
5. Parents should be consulted on each child's progress in the toilet training process before leaving the child with volunteers or staff members. Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in the nursery will be

- recorded on the registration card (“Georgia can use the toilet, but she needs to be reminded – ask her if she needs to go.”).
6. Children should be verbally assisted where possible. If physical assistance is necessary, another staff member or volunteer should be present, when possible.
 7. “Accidents” should be handled by reassuring the child and completing the changing of diapers or underwear and clothing. Extra clothing and diapers are available in the children’s area, if the parent has not furnished a clothing change.

School Age Children

School age children may be accompanied to the restroom for supervision and assistance when needed. Children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities. Staff members and volunteers should never take a lone child to the restroom.

If a staff member or volunteer must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, he or she should seek out another worker to accompany him/her. If another worker is not available to accompany, he/she should go to the exterior bathroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance. If the child requires assistance, the worker should leave the exterior bathroom door open when entering the bathroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing their activities, while the child remains behind the door of the bathroom stall. Any assistance with the straightening or fastening of garments should be done in the presence of another staff member or volunteer.

Special Needs

Parents will offer instruction to staff members or volunteers to change the diapers of special needs individuals. After the age of 4, parents or legal guardians will change all special needs individuals.

Intoxicants

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any church facility, while

traveling with children, or while working with or supervising children during any First Denton program or activity.

Nudity

Staff and volunteers in First Denton's Children's Ministry should never be nude in the presence of children in their care. In the event there is a situation that may call for or contemplate the possibility of nudity (i.e. changing clothes during a pool party, weekend or overnight retreat, etc.), the staff member or volunteer leading the event will communicate a plan to the Children's Minister concerning arrangements for showering or changing clothes.

One-To-One Interactions with Students

Staff members and volunteers should never conduct one-to-one, unobserved meetings or interaction with children while participating in Children's Ministry activities or programs. Another trained, screened adult should always be present.

Transportation

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for children. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when workers are involved in the transportation of children:

1. Children should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided. Staff members and volunteers should avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one child in transport.
2. Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with children while in vehicles.
3. No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving Church vans, or vehicles owned or rented by First Denton, unless in an emergency.

4. No drivers under age 25 may drive Church-owned or rented vehicles.

Parental Contact

Parents who leave a child in the care of First Denton staff members and volunteers during church services or activities will be contacted if a child becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in Children's Ministry programs.

Parental Involvement

Parents have an open invitation to observe all programs and activities in which their child is involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with their child's program will be required to complete the aforementioned volunteer application and screening process, including background check.

Physical Contact

First Denton is committed to protecting children in its care. To this end, First Denton has implemented a 'physical contact policy' that promotes a positive, nurturing environment while protecting children. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by those working in Children's Ministry programs:

1. Hugging, pats on the back and other forms of appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and children are important for children's development and are generally suitable in the church setting.
2. Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching or displays of affection should be immediately reported to an immediate supervisor and the Children's Minister or the Executive Pastor/Business Administrator.

3. Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child, and never be based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.
4. Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other children or Children's Ministry staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.
5. Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff members or volunteers in Children's Ministry must foster trust at all times. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
6. Do not force physical contact, touch or affection on a reluctant child. A child's preference not to be touched must be respected.
7. Staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.
8. Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse must be reported immediately to an immediate supervisor and the Children's Minister or the Executive Pastor/Business Administrator.

Sexually Oriented Conversations

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with children and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any child in the program.

Sexually Oriented Materials

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from possessing (or transmitting to a child) any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children in their care.

Tobacco Use

First Denton requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of children or their parents, or during First Denton activities or programs. First Denton is a tobacco-free facility.

Verbal Interactions

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and children should be positive and uplifting. Staff members and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of children.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to children in a way that is or could be construed by a reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff members and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children.

Release of Children

At any time that a child has been entrusted to Children's Ministry staff members or volunteers, the Church incurs responsibility for the safety and welfare of the child. Staff members and volunteers must act to ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge.

Children's Ministry staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing children in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities.

It is presumed a person who drops off a child has authority to pick up that child.

In the event that staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact their immediate supervisor or the Children's Minister before releasing the child.

Supervision

Staff members and volunteers in Children's Ministry are expected to provide adequate supervision for children in their care while working in church programs.