



Child Safety at Oak Church

We are grateful to God for the privilege of welcoming and including children into the life and ministry of Oak Church. Providing care and Biblical instruction to children is a holy calling, and our church community is committed to doing all that it can to ensure a safe, positive, and rewarding experience for children participating in church activities. The joy of ministry to children includes the responsibility of protecting them from harm. Protecting the children in our care, the reputation of the adults who serve those children, and the ministry of Oak Church requires some specific precautions and processes. The policies and procedures included in this brochure are reflected in all Children's Ministry activities. All other programs serving children at the church must be in compliance with these guidelines. Any questions about these guidelines or anything else related to Oak Kids Ministry can be directed to Rev. Meg Hoffman, Pastor and Children's Director. meg@oakdurham.org

Updated August 2022

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Personnel Precautions

All Oak Kids volunteers must undergo a background check to ensure there is nothing in their personal history or experience that would preclude them from working with children. Anyone with a criminal history involving crimes against children will not be allowed to work with children at Oak Church.

All church employees and Oak Kids volunteers must also complete either the in-person *Keeping Kids Safe: Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse* training course or the online [*Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children*](#) training.

Environmental Precautions

Classes are organized in specific ways to ensure child safety:

- No classes or meetings with children may be held behind closed doors unless the door has a window through which one can see into the room. A classroom that does not have a door with a window must be left partially open at all times.
- The outer doors of bathrooms should always be propped open.
- An adult should never be alone in an isolated area with a single child. If an adult needs to talk one-on-one with a child, it should be done in an open area, such as a hallway.
- Nursery rooms and kids' classes should regularly have two or more adults in the room. (This is often referred to as the Two Adult Rule.)
- Leaders should avoid giving gifts to individual children without the prior knowledge of the parents. Modest gifts on a group basis or small contest prizes awarded openly are fine.
- Adults should never be alone in a car with a single child other than their own.
- Parents and Guardians are always welcome in a class or program. No activity is closed or private.

Child Safety Procedures

The following procedures are required for safely managing the needs of children while they are involved in a church activity.

Pick-Up and Drop-Off

When a parent or guardian drops off a child for the first time, they must provide the child's name, age, an emergency contact number, and allergy information for the child.

This information is already provided on the attendance sheet for regular attendees. Caregivers dropping off children in the nursery can add this information to the day's attendance sheet. Caregivers sending their children to Godly Play from the service can either escort their child to the Godly Play room and provide information there or can provide this information to the volunteer who is escorting the children to the Children's Wing before the group leaves the main building.

Bathroom Use

These policies try to find the balance between providing appropriate supervision while also respecting children's privacy. The goal is to never leave two or more children unsupervised while also following the Two Adult Rule. Volunteers should use their best judgment and call Pastor Meg, a parent, or another volunteer for help if necessary.

Precautions:

- Keep exterior doors to the restroom propped open at all times.
- It is best for adults to take several children, or even an entire class, to the bathroom at the same time. For the Godly Play class, there is a designated bathroom break before entering the classroom in which children will line up and take turns using the restroom. Children waiting for a stall or urinal should wait in the hallway. One adult will stand in the hall to supervise the restrooms while the other supervises the children who are waiting outside the door.
- Parents should take their children to the bathroom for a "potty try" before dropping them off in the nursery.
- If a child needs to use the restroom during class but does not need assistance, an adult should check that the bathroom is empty before allowing the child to enter. At this point, the adult can stand in the hall (or in the nursery as long as there is a clear line of sight to the restroom) with the exterior door to the bathroom open.
- If a child needs assistance in the restroom, the adult volunteer or paid childcare provider should encourage the child to do as much as they can for themselves. The adult who is assisting a child in the bathroom should leave the stall door slightly ajar and stand between the child who is using the bathroom and the door so that the child has a sense of privacy while also keeping sight lines open into the bathroom from the hall.
- Two or more children should never be in the bathroom together without an adult present to supervise.

Diaper Changing

If a child's parent is not present, diaper changing should be turned over to a volunteer who has completed the personal history inquiry and been trained. Universal precautions will be followed, including the use of disposable changing pads and disposable gloves. Caregivers should wash hands immediately after changing a diaper. At the end of nursery time, volunteers can throw away the pail liner if it is full. Otherwise, they can just make sure the pail is latched closed.

Discipline

The best method for handling discipline is prevention of problems. Adults supervising children should always have a plan for activities that will keep the children positively occupied. If a child is not able to interact with other children in a positive way, the adult should first remind and encourage correct behavior. If problems persist, the child can be removed from the activity or group. Younger children can often be redirected into another activity. Adults should also communicate expectations clearly. See Appendix B for more specific suggestions about responding to disruptions.

All adults should treat children kindly and respectfully. They should not hit or spank in any way or verbally denigrate a child. However, children's misbehavior should not be ignored. If a child's actions are repeatedly disrespectful or harmful to others, the parent should be called immediately. Parents should be regularly informed of behavior problems and any actions taken by the leader or paid childcare provider to correct behavior. Pastor Meg is available to help with behavior issues.

Affection

Church staff, volunteers, or paid childcare providers should not ask children for hugs or any physical affection, but may receive it joyfully when it is given. Adults can feel free to pat a back, hold a hand, or put an arm around a child's shoulder. We do not allow tickling, wrestling, or playing "dog pile" with children. Adults should also avoid allowing children over the age of 4 to sit in their laps.

A child's preference not to be touched shall be respected at all times. At no time should an adult force affection upon a reluctant child.

Accident or Injury

When caring for a child's injury, illness, or bathroom accident, disposable gloves should be used. It is helpful for the adult to talk through with a young child what is being done, and why, as they are being cleaned or bandaged. The incident should be reported to the parent and Pastor Meg.

Observation and Supervision

Children's activities should be observed regularly. On Sundays, staff, parents, and other volunteers may be in and out of the classrooms to help and observe. No classroom should be considered closed or private.

We strive to keep a 1:3 adult / child ratio with babies, a 1:5 ratio with preschoolers and a 1:10 ratio with elementary aged children, keeping in mind that no adult should be alone with a child. Being alone with a group of children is permitted but not optimal. These ratios should be considered minimum standards for safety. If a volunteer feels that they cannot successfully manage the children in their care or if these ratios are compromised, the Pastor Meg and / or the "on call" point person should be contacted via text message immediately.

Social Media and Privacy

Families will be asked to sign a photo release form for their children's image to be used in promotional materials for Oak Church. Oak Church volunteers should not share images or names of the children in their care on social media sites such as Instagram or Facebook unless specific permission of the child's parent has been granted.

Addressing Problems

If a volunteer or paid childcare provider gets into a situation which could be misinterpreted, it should be reported immediately. Any observation of misconduct or questionable behavior by a volunteer, paid childcare provider, or member of the staff should be reported to the Children's Ministry Director or pastor immediately. No allegation or complaint will be ignored. See Appendix C for Oak Church's Response Plan for handling allegations of abuse.

Appendix A:

Guidelines for childcare at the church during Mustard Seed Groups or other meetings

The childcare provider for Mustard Seed groups or other meetings should follow all the above guidelines. In addition, the following are provided for clarification.

- Parents will supervise their own children for a bathroom break (as applicable) before escorting them into the nursery.
- The childcare provider will supervise the children carefully at all times and never leave them unattended.
- Children are not permitted to leave the room to get water, additional toys, or any other reason other than going to the bathroom, in which case the policies under Bathroom Use (see above) should be followed. A pitcher of water and cups will be provided in the nursery for children without their own water bottles.
- If a child needs to use the restroom after entering the nursery, an adult needs to escort them. If there is only one childcare provider present, they should text the parent or designee for help.
- Two or more children should never be together without an adult present to supervise them.

Appendix B:

Tips For Handling Disruptions

When children need to be participating in a group activity and a child is disruptive, these steps are often helpful:

- Continue the lesson, but look directly at the child.
- Continue the lesson, but move near the child.
- Continue the lesson, but gently place a hand on the child's shoulder.
- Pause the lesson, and look directly at the child, use name.
- Move the child to another place in the group.
- Talk one-on-one or have a helper talk specifically with the child.
- Take the child from the room and contact Pastor Meg or designated "on call" point person for help.

Appendix C:

Response Plan for Abuse

This policy is appropriate for the handling of allegations of abuse, regardless of the age of the accused, in the context of church related activities. When handling allegations of abuse outside of church related activities, this policy provides guidance for proper response, but the exact steps below may not directly apply and the chain of custody of information and response may vary. In any event, Oak Church will seek to minister and provide Christian support for alleged victims, offenders, and their families.

Guiding Principles

Any person who has cause to suspect that any minor has been abused has a legal responsibility to report the suspected abuse to the proper authorities. When responding to allegations of abuse, Oak Church and its representatives will be guided by several key principles:

1. All reports must be taken seriously.
2. It is the individual responsibility of the person suspecting abuse to comply with the law and report any suspected abuse of a juvenile to the Durham County Department of Social Services immediately.
- 3 Oak Church will support individuals who suspect abuse has occurred and will assist them in reporting the suspected abuse if necessary.
4. Oak Church will proactively cooperate with law enforcement and social services.
5. The victim will not be blamed.
6. Allegations will be handled with sensitivity for people's privacy and confidentiality.
7. Oak Church will seek to provide Christian support as appropriate for alleged victims, alleged offenders, and their families.
8. The insurance carrier will be contacted as soon as possible

Upon Hearing a Report of Alleged Abuse

The person hearing the initial report should follow these steps, keeping in mind they should listen supportively without judging or advising:

1. Do not investigate or attempt to verify the allegations of the report.
2. Ask basic questions to clarify facts if needed, but do not engage in a question and answer format of interviewing. Simply provide an open opportunity for the report and actively listen to receive it.
3. Note the pertinent details in writing as soon as possible after hearing the report, but don't take notes while the person reporting is speaking. Give them your full attention.
4. Contact Durham County Department of Social Services immediately as prescribed in the NC General Statute 7B-301 and report the suspected abuse of a juvenile. (number below)
5. If support or assistance in reporting the suspected abuse is desired or immediately after the report is made, contact the Children's Ministry Director or Pastor. If the Pastor or Children's Ministry Director is suspected of perpetrating the abuse, contact and report with an uninvolved staff member or member of the Elder Team.
6. If the above leadership is unavailable or cannot be contacted in a timely manner, the person hearing of the alleged abuse must still report it to authorities as prescribed in the NC General Statute 7B-301.
7. If the immediate safety of the minor is at risk, the person hearing the initial report of abuse must use their own judgment to decide the best way to proceed. They may seek immediate help from law enforcement or other trusted parties to ensure the safety of the minor.
6. Do not discuss the allegation with anyone other than the aforementioned individuals unless required by law enforcement officials.

[Durham Co. Dept of Human Services, Child Protective Services](#) 919-560-8424 (7:30-5:30 M-F)

Call 911 (after business hours)

Local law enforcement call 911

Elder team contacts: Bettejean Cramer, Rachel Breslin, Sara Baker, Brian Wisselink, Justin Farmer, Laurel Ellzey, Kurt Bubalo, Gary Davis

Church Leaders Responding to Alleged Abuse

The Response Team is not trying to determine guilt or innocence, only whether the allegations are worthy of further investigation.

A Response Team will be formed under the following guidelines:

1. The Response Team shall be as small as necessary.
2. The Response Team shall consist of the following:
 1. The Pastor (unless accused)
 2. The Children's Ministry Director (unless accused)
 3. A minimum of three (3) Elders
 4. A Mental Health professional (if not already included in the above)
 5. Any other person the Response Team feels is necessary

The Response Team shall respond within 24 hours of hearing the initial allegation of abuse, as defined in NC General Statute 7B-301, using the following guidelines:

1. The Response Team shall clarify and evaluate the report with the person(s) who heard the initial report and with the victim if appropriate.
2. The Response Team shall ensure that the alleged maltreatment is reported immediately as prescribed in the NC General Statute 7B-301 if the victim is a juvenile.
3. If the accused is a member or regular attendee at Oak Church, the Response Team will determine next steps in order to keep children safe, up to and including preventing the accused from entering church property.
4. The Response Team shall inform the church's insurance carrier.
5. The Response Team should designate one of its members as a spokesperson. All contact with the news media should be handled by the spokesperson. The team should inform all necessary persons not to respond to media inquiries except to refer questions to the spokesperson.
6. The Response Team should initiate appropriate church-wide education, support and healing activities, involving others where necessary and appropriate.