



**BEFREE
CHURCH**

Policies & Procedures

for Student Ministries



BE Free Church Student Ministries

Dear Youth Ministries Volunteer or Staff Member,

Welcome to BE Free Church Student Ministry!

At BE Free Church, we take our responsibility to care for children and youth seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which youth can grow in relationship with Jesus Christ.

The pages of this handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guidelines for volunteers and staff members providing services to youth from 6th through 12th grades at BE Free Church. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for children and students, protecting students, you, and the mission of BE Free Church.

After you have carefully read these policies, please sign and return the agreement form located on the last page. If you have questions, please contact your ministry leader.

Sincerely,

BE Free Church Leadership

BE Free Church Policies & Procedures for Student Ministry

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Overview of BE Free Church Student Safety System

BE Free Church requires all staff members and volunteers working with children or students (and other vulnerable populations) to complete **FOUR SAFETY STEPS** before ministry work or volunteer placements begin.

SCREENING PROCESS

Staff members and volunteers are required to complete the BE Free Church Screening Process, which requires a staff member or volunteer to:

- complete an Employee Application (employees only)
- complete the Volunteer Application (employees and volunteers)
- complete a face-to-face interview (employees and volunteers)
- provide references to be checked (employees and volunteers)

*A volunteer must regularly attend BE Free Church for one year before being considered to serve in volunteer positions providing access to children, students or vulnerable populations. Exceptions of the one-year attendance requirement may be made with approval of ministry staff and church leadership. All volunteers must be 19 years old to serve in the Student Ministry.

SEXUAL ABUSE AWARENESS TRAINING

BE Free Church policies and procedures require that staff members and volunteers avoid abusive behavior of any kind. Staff in student ministries and volunteers are required to report any policy violations. Timely documentation of incidents will be submitted to the BE Free Church Safety Committee for monitoring and oversight. Staff in youth ministries 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. Grooming is restricted prohibited behavior.

To equip BE Free Church and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, BE Free Church requires all staff in youth ministries and volunteers to complete MinistrySafe's Sexual Abuse Awareness Training (live or online at www.MinistrySafe.com). This training will be renewed every two years.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Staff in Youth ministries 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. The last page indicated will be returned for record to the appropriate Ministry Leader.

CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK

BE Free Church requires that all staff members and volunteers working or volunteering in children's or student activities or programming undergo a criminal background check. Depending upon position, differing levels or intensity of background check may be required. Any reports on the Criminal Background check will warrant further investigation. Individuals who have committed sexually-oriented or sex-related crimes may not serve in any area providing services to children or minors. In addition, certain other past criminal acts *may* preclude an applicant from serving minors. Criminal Background Checks will be routinely updated for all children-volunteers and workers. Any future incidents with law enforcement or

other pertinent services (driving or medical) should be brought to the Ministry Leader for communication as long as involved in active volunteering.

Student Safety Policy

ABUSE - ZERO TOLERANCE

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

In the event that staff or volunteers observe any inappropriate behaviors (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is their responsibility to immediately report their observations to their Ministry Area Leader and member of the pastoral staff.

ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES

BE Free Church staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff members or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of BE Free Children Church policies. Failure to enforce and violations of these BE Free Children policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, corrective and retraining action, or reassignment from any position directly or indirectly within Children's and Youth Ministries – for both volunteers and staff members. All incidents will be single-documented, archived, and signed by all appropriate parties regardless of perceived intensity within a timely manner to be reviewed.

Reporting Abuse or Suspicion of Abuse

REPORTING VIOLATIONS OF POLICIES

In order to maintain a safe environment for our children, BE Free Church staff members and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies. All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to their ministry area leader, or a member of the pastoral staff.

SUSPENSION: CONSEQUENCES OF POLICY 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 BE Free Church Children's Ministries. 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 BE Free Church. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment from BE Free Church.

Knowingly failing to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for termination (employee) or removal (volunteer). Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children, students or vulnerable populations at BE Free Church.

REPORTING ABUSE OR SUSPICION OF ABUSE

BE Free Church 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 will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to the Pastoral Staff and the Police Department, Child Protective Services, or other appropriate agency.

Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible that a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to groom a child for sexual abuse. Please report 'grooming' behavior, policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to an immediate supervisor, such that the church may take appropriate action to safeguard children in the program.

We report suspected or alleged abuse or neglect of children to the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF)

Abuse Hotline: 1-800-842-2288

Because many adults are unfamiliar with Connecticut reporting requirements and may be fearful of the process, BE Free Church utilizes a 'tandem or dual report' model, where permitted. A 'dual report' occurs when a BE Free Church supervisor reports the suspicion or allegation together with the individual who saw, heard or received information causing him or her to suspect abuse or neglect.

This practice is not required, or intended to inhibit any staff member or volunteer from reporting to law enforcement, DCF, or the abuse hotline directly. Instead, it is meant to facilitate reporting, protect children and support individuals who may not feel able or willing to report alone.

No permission is needed from BE Free Church before reporting to law enforcement personnel or the Child Abuse Hotline.

All reports made to law enforcement or DCF are to be reported to church pastoral staff or ministry leaders within 24 hours.

When in doubt, report.

Mental Health - Suicide, suicidal thoughts, self harm

Many leaders are unsure about how to address sensitive mental health areas. The following information is provided to help leaders recognize and respond effectively. A leader is not expected to assess 'risk' or plan intervention for a child but rather recognize signs of suicidal thoughts and self-harm, and to encourage help for the student.

Suicide is a death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior.

A **suicide attempt** is a non-fatal, self-directed, and potentially injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior. Previous suicide attempts significantly increase a youth's risk of death by suicide and often lead to subsequent and more lethal suicide attempts.

Suicidal ideation refers to thinking about or planning suicide. The thoughts lie on a continuum of severity from a wish to die with no method, plan, intent, or behavior, to active suicidal ideation with a specific plan and intent. Although suicidal ideation does not include physically harmful behaviors, over one third of adolescents who experience suicidal ideation will attempt suicide within their lifetimes.

Self-harm is behavior that is self-directed and deliberately results in injury or the potential for injury to oneself. The term, also referred to as self-directed violence, encompasses both suicidal and non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI), and self-harm with unclear intent. NSSI is distinguished from a suicide attempt or suicide because it does not include suicidal intent. NSSI is considered a significant risk factor for both suicide attempts and death by suicide and may or may not accompany suicidal ideation.

References: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): *Treatment for Suicidal Ideation, Self-harm, and Suicide Attempts Among Youth*. SAMHSA Publication No. PEP20-06-01-002 Rockville, MD: National Mental Health and Substance Use Policy Laboratory. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2020.

REPORTING

Direct - The student directly expresses feelings, actions, inclinations, or verbal communication related to suicide or self harm to a leader, or a leader witnesses something concerning.

- Remain calm.
- Ask the youth directly if he or she is thinking about suicide (e.g., "Are you thinking of suicide?").
- Focus on your concern for their well-being and avoid being accusatory.
- Listen.
- Reassure them that there is help.
- Do not judge.
- Provide constant supervision. Do not leave the youth alone.
- Remove means for self-harm.
- Get help: No one should ever agree to keep a youth's suicidal thoughts a secret and instead should tell an appropriate ministry leader.
- National Suicide Prevention Line for suicidal incidents 800-273- 8255
- Complete an incident report
- Parents/Guardian will be informed of the incident by the ministry leader and helped to foster support for students.

Indirect - another youth or source expresses knowledge or suspicions related to a youth's suicidal or self-harming behavior

- Remain calm and affirm the reporting student for sharing.
- Ask directly "how / what happened to reveal this?"
- Listen.
- Reassure them that there is help.
- Do not judge.
- Get help: inform ministry leaders or another leader
- Complete an incident report
- Encourage the reporting individual to have the youth reach out to a parent, leader, or ministry leader directly.
- Inform the reporting individual that leaders and ministry will follow up with the youth and parents directly.
- Contact the parents of the youth immediately

- National Suicide Prevention Line for advice 800-273- 8255

ROLE OF LEADER AND MINISTRY

Foster trust and open communications between youth and leaders. Focus on keeping youth safe in the moment and ongoing.

Get help - This person may know who they want to talk to (a therapist, their guardian, their partner).

Regardless of the situation, communicate with ministry leaders about the situation both in incident reports and informing ministry leaders.

Child Safety Committee

CHILD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Recognizing the importance of providing and maintaining a safe environment for youth, BE Free Church will appoint and maintain a Child Safety Committee, which will meet a minimum twice yearly.

The purpose of the Safety Committee is to enable BE Free Church Children's Ministries to carry out appropriate ministry activities while safeguarding program participants against emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

COMPOSITION

The Child Safety Committee will be comprised of the following members but not limited to:

- the Associate Pastor
- the Director of Children's Ministries
- a member of the Elder Board
- a member of the church body with relevant experience and expertise

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Child Safety Committee will be charged with the following duties:

Applying and communicating existing BE Free Church policies and procedures related to children's safety and risk management issues.

Monitoring all Children's Ministries programs for ongoing compliance with safety policies.

Making recommendations to the BE Free Church Board of Elders regarding safety issues.

Report regularly to the Elder Board

Reporting annually to the church membership at the BE Free Church annual meeting

Student Ministry Staff Monitoring Plan

BUILDING SAFETY AND SUPERVISION

Every ministry area leader is responsible for ensuring that the utilized areas (indoors and outdoors) are monitored and supervised during programming that serves children. This may include unobserved monitoring of staff members, volunteers and students. No student will ever be left unattended in a ministry area during regular programming, class or activity. All students should be easily observable during regular programming, class or activity.

Two trained, screened adults should supervise students at all times.

Avoid being alone with an individual student in any room or during any ministry program. If one supervising volunteer/staff must leave a group of children, another volunteer or employee must be notified so that the Two Person Rule can be followed.

If two individuals serving in a room are related to one another, a third unrelated volunteer or staff member must be present.

If an unusual circumstance occurs and you find yourself alone with a single youth, take the youth to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others.

If you need to talk with a youth alone, do it in the hallway or a highly visible area, or have another leader with you. After every ministry event, ensure that every room, area and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

Student Safety Measures

VOLUNTEER TO STUDENT RATIOS

BE Free Church is committed to providing adequate supervision in all Student Ministries programs. Accordingly, the following worker to student ratios will be observed:

1 - 10 students	at least 2 staff members or volunteers (2 adult rule)
11 - 29 students	at least 2 staff members or volunteers
30+ students	at least 3 staff members or volunteers

Disciplinary Policies

DISCIPLINE

No physical discipline may be used for behavior management of students.

In the event of a fight or physical altercation, verbally redirect those involved and avoid physical intervention unless necessary for the safety of other students. In these instances, staff members and leaders are allowed to restrain a student with appropriate physical force, as needed.

Problem behavior seen as uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and the Ministry Leader.

Any behavior problems will be handled by:

A Youth Leader remains calm and firmly asks the student to correct the behavior.

A Youth Leader will talk with the student to discuss the problem behavior and write an incident report.

A Youth Leader will work with all parties to resolve and reconcile as possible

A Youth Leader will inform other leaders and ministry leader of situation

Parents will be notified of discipline or behavior problems.

If a student is unruly or fails to comply with verbal warnings or instructions, that student may be asked to leave (if not endangered by doing so) or the student's parent will be contacted to pick up the student.

As a final measure, the student may be prohibited from attending certain ministry events.

BULLYING

Verbal, physical or emotional bullying is not acceptable in BE Free Church ministry programs. At the first sign of bullying in any form, act decisively, inform ministry area leaders, and write an incident report.

1. *First Offense:* Issue a warning to the student and a general reminder to the group that this kind of interaction is inappropriate.
2. *Second Offense:* Pull the offending student(s) from the group (in a seen or supervised location) and discuss the inappropriate interaction or behavior. Set clear parameters and behavioral goals. Let the student know that the next step is communication with a pastor and the student's parents. Notify an immediate supervisor of ANY signs of bullying or verbal abuse.

Check in with the target child(ren) who may have been bullied to ensure emotional and physical safety.

3. *Third Offense:* Send the student to a pastor for a phone call to his or her parents and possible removal from the trip, camp or event.

Restroom Policies

Be aware if a student repeatedly leaves to use the restroom and stays there for unusual periods of time.

Nudity

Staff members and volunteers in BE Free Church's Youth Ministries 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.), staff member/volunteer determine an appropriate approach for arrangements of showering or changing clothes which will allow for the privacy of all individuals involved to be maintained.

Tobacco/Marijuana Use/Intoxicants

BE Free Church requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco or marijuana products in church facilities, while in the presence of students or their parents, or during BE Free Church activities or programs. BE Free Church is a tobacco-free and marijuana-free facility inside and on walkways.

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or marijuana or any illegal drugs while in any BE Free Church facility, while traveling with

students, or while working with or supervising students. In addition, Ministry area leaders may suspend the activities of any volunteer if a legal, prescribed medication produces inappropriate behaviors.

Medication / First Aid

Do not administer medication of any kind to any youth while serving in ministry programs, including 'over the counter' drugs.

Basic First Aid can be administered as needed with a communication to both parents and BE Free Church through an Incident Report.

All medications brought into by a youth or administered during ministry events should have ministry leaders knowledge, documented, and have parent permission.

Interactions with Youth/Students

Meeting the emotional or spiritual needs of students may occasionally involve interaction on an individual basis.

Please observe the following guidelines when interacting with minors:

The Two Adult Rule should be diligently followed during ministry programs: do not be isolated with an individual student in any room or building.

In the event you find yourself alone with a single student, move to a room or area occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others.

One-to-one meetings with an individual student must occur at a time when others are present and where interactions can be easily observed in a public setting. One leader to two students is appropriate in some cases of having more focused conversations. All one-to-one interactions will be shared with other leaders and ministry leaders.

Example: If a student desires additional conversation after regular programming has concluded, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present, or into a public space.

If a closed-door meeting must occur, it should occur on church property, with a second adult present. The door must remain unlocked.

Any ongoing meetings with students (such as counseling, one-to-one discipleship, etc.) should be discussed with a Ministry Leader, and should comply with the Two Adult Rule OR occur in a public, easily observed location.

Youth Leaders may not date (or have *any* sort of romantic interaction with) students in the student ministry regardless of age difference.

SEXUALLY ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS

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

However, it is expected that from time to time student ministry discussions and lessons may address issues related to dating, sex and human sexuality.

These lessons will convey to the students the church's views on these topics.

Students may have questions/struggles in this area and desire to confide in a trusted adult leader for guidance.

Proceed with great caution, teach with sensitivity and from a biblical perspective.

- If a student's questions or comments on a sexual matter become too detailed or explicit in a group setting, the leader should use discretion and set up another time to meet with this student.

For any follow up meeting: inform Ministry Leader first, comply with the Two Adult Rule OR meet in a public, easily observed location.

- When in doubt as to whether a conversation could be interpreted as a "sexually oriented conversation," treat the conversation as such and follow this policy.

SEXUALLY ORIENTED MATERIAL

Staff members and volunteers in Children's Ministries at BE Free Church are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of students.

PHYSICAL CONTACT

BE Free Church promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our Children's Ministries while protecting children.

Physical contact should be for the benefit of the student, and not be based upon the emotional needs of a Youth Leader or volunteer.

Your personal behavior must foster trust at all times.

Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant student, except in cases of necessary restraint for the protection of the student or others.

A student's preference *not* to be touched must be respected. Students comfort is priority of appropriate physical interactions

Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of others.

RESTRICTED BEHAVIOR:

- A sexual/romantic relationship with a student is never acceptable.

- Never touch a student in sensitive areas (breasts, buttocks, genitals) even if a student has been injured in one of these areas. Never allow casual contact in these areas, under or over clothing.
- No sitting on laps.
- No hand-holding, unless part of a worship/prayer service or a group game.
- Never touch in anger or disgust.
- Never touch in a manner that may be construed as sexually suggestive.
- Avoid touching a student between the navel and the knees.
- Never kiss a student, or give (or receive) a massage.
- Never place hands beneath a student's clothing to play, rub, or comfort.
- Never tickle, participate in 'horse-play' or wrestle with a student.

VERBAL INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS/YOUTH

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and youth should be positive and uplifting. BE Free Church 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 youth.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to students in a way that is or could be construed by any 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 students.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

All communication with youth must be above reproach and indicative of healthy boundaries.

As with any communication, the content of any electronic communication should be readily available to share with the ministry leader or a parent.

All communication between youth and leaders should be transparent and can be reviewed

TEXTING

In general, texts should occur in 'group' form, whenever possible.

Prudent judgment must be used in the timing and content of texts.

Do not text before 7am or after 10pm.

Do not share photos and/or videos of a sexual or suggestive nature.

Avoid discussion of any sexual topic via texts.

PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

As a Student Ministries Leader, maintain a high moral standard in your social media presence. Inappropriate social media content may be a basis for suspension from participation in student ministry at BE Free Church.

Please be cautious about the content of the posts on your personal social media. Please ensure that photos or videos posted on social media reflect BE Free Church Student Ministry well.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Please dress in suitable attire as a role model to students.

TRANSPORTATION

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

- Youth should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided.
- Staff members and volunteers are to avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one student in transport unless a second screened trained volunteer is present.
- Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with youth while in vehicles.
- Hands free devices only may be utilized by the driver while driving BE Free Church vehicles, or vehicles owned or rented or driving for a BE Free Church event.
- All drivers of BE Free Church events should have a valid and current driver's license, active insurance, and drivers history.
- Driver's are responsible to communicate a change in driver's status promptly

OUT-OF-PROGRAM CONTACT WITH YOUTH

BE Free Church safety standards established to protect youth and ensure healthy relationships should be respected *outside* ministry programs as well. In addition to ministry safety standards, the following policies should be respected in all interactions with youth occurring *outside* ministry programs.

- Never be alone with a minor in an unobserved context or location.
- Any dating or sexual relationship of any kind with a youth is strictly prohibited.
- Never spend the night at a youth's home or invite a student to spend the night at your home or place yourself in a potentially situation
- Prior relationships to Youth Ministry may exist and should be clarified before starting Youth Ministry and with parent permission.

PLANNING EVENTS

When planning a group event outside of regular programming, volunteer leaders should keep parents and Youth Leaders informed of details and abide by BE Free Church policies. Some events may require a release form.

OVERNIGHT EVENTS

Some youth ministry activities/events require overnight sleeping arrangements for students, staff members and volunteers (i.e. camp, mission trips, etc.). All programmed overnights must be approved by a ministry supervisor and receive permission from parents.

No overnights are allowed on BE Free Church property unless part of a ministry-sponsored event.

No overnight between any church staff member or volunteer and an unrelated minor may occur in any context. If pre-existing family relationships exist wherein overnights may occur between 'family friends', these relationships must be communicated to a ministry supervisor.

Parental Involvement

Parents are encouraged to visit any and all services and programs in which their child is involved at BE Free Church. 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 children's programs at BE Free Church will be required to complete the BE Free Church volunteer application and screening process.

Parents will be contacted if a student becomes ill, injured, demonstrates concerning behavior, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in ministry programs.

Approved by BE Free Board of Elders 3/8/23

Policies and Procedures
Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement

This page is to be signed, detached, and delivered to the Ministry Area Leader.

I have received and read a copy of BE Free Church's Student Ministries Policies and Procedures and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving or working at BE Free Church.

I have reviewed the duties listed in my ministry position description, and I agree to fulfill these duties. I understand I may choose to end my employment or voluntary service at BE Free Church at any time (If possible, I will provide two weeks' notice to my ministry area leader).

I acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this handbook in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between me and BE Free Church. If applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no monetary compensation for hours worked.

I understand it is my responsibility to communicate any applicable changes in my life that may impact my role with volunteering or working with youth.

I acknowledge receipt of the BE Free Church policies and procedures manual.

Staff Member or Volunteer's name (please print)

Staff Member or Volunteer's signature

Date: _____

Received and reviewed by:

(please print)

Ministry Role:

Signature

Date: _____