



**YOUTH AND FAMILY**

**MINISTRY**

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## **YOUTH EDUCATION POLICIES**

### **General Policies**

In pursuit of its mission as a Unity church, Unity of Naples maintains a Unity Youth and Family Ministry, which reaches out to children and young people, and provides classes and activities for nursery, pre-school, and kindergarten through eighth grade. The Church is committed to providing the necessary materials and training for those who volunteer to teach in the Youth Education ministry.

We take our responsibility seriously in selecting the curriculum, programs, and people that will influence a young person's developing awareness of God's presence within them. Because of these beliefs we have taken steps to create policies and procedures that promote a healthy environment, and protect our young people.

The Senior Minister shall at all times have the right to examine all the materials taught as part of this Ministry. The Senior Minister shall also decide who will be delegated to direct this Ministry, and shall ensure that the spiritual principles of Unity are at all times given prominence.

### **Registration/Attendance Records**

Children and young people attending youth ministry classes should be registered, and have their attendance properly recorded. Such information should remain confidential, and also be held securely within the Church office, or Youth Education Directors' records, in case parents or guardians need to be contacted in case of an emergency.

Students' registration records should be updated annually, and parents or guardians should sign for, and receive a copy of, the Youth and Family Ministry Policies and Procedures.

### **Class Size/Adult Ratio**

#### **Nursery**

#### **Child to adult ratio:**

Under the age of one: Four (4) to one (1) adult.

Ages one (1) to five (5): Six (6) children to one (1) adult

#### **UniKids/Uniteen/YOU**

#### **Child to Adult ratio:**

Fifteen (15) children to one (1) adult.

Once these ratios are exceeded, either further approved volunteers must be called upon to assist, or parents should be invited to take their children to the chapel in the rear of the Sanctuary.

## **Safety**

Minors are never to be left unattended while on Church property, or at a Church-sponsored event. Minors in the care of Youth Education should be supervised at all times by two adults (2): one acting as teacher and one as assistant.

## **Incident/Accident Reporting**

Accidents or incidents occurring during the time when children are in the care of Youth and Family Ministry should be reported promptly to the Youth Education Director(s). A Youth Education Accident/Incident Reporting Form should be completed, and copies sent to the Senior Minister and Operations Manager. Copies of these forms are kept in the Church Office.

## **Fire Alarm/Emergency Building Exit**

If the fire alarm sounds, teachers and other Youth Education volunteers should directly take all children in their care to the fire collection point at the labyrinth by the safest route possible. The weekly sign-in sheets should be used to make sure that all children are accounted for. All persons should remain at the labyrinth until the fire department gives the all-clear, and/or parents/guardians sign out and pick up their child/children.

## **Field Trips**

Any field trips organized or sponsored by the Youth Education Ministry of Unity of Naples must follow the guidelines suggested by the Church insurance company. A release form must be filled out and signed by the parent or guardian of each child participating in an off-site event. A copy of the medical releases and permission slips for each trip should be kept on file in the Youth Education Director's office.

- ◆ Only those individuals known to, and approved by the Youth and Family Ministry may act as chaperones or sponsors for these events. Current completed nationwide criminal background checks on all chaperones or sponsors must be on file with the Church.<sup>1</sup>
- ◆ Each field trip driver will carry in their car, copies of permission slips and medical releases for each child/adult.
- ◆ A list of those individuals traveling in each vehicle should be kept on file in the office, and a copy should be given to each driver.

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<sup>1</sup> Church liability insurance policy requirement

- ◆ The minimum age for all drivers is 25 years old.
- ◆ There must be two (2) drivers per vehicle for any trips out of Collier/Lee County.
- ◆ All drivers must have a current driver's license. An up-to-date copy of each driver's license, and current proof of insurance, should be kept on file in the Youth Education Director's office.
- ◆ Each driver transporting children must ensure that, where provided, seat belts are worn. Drivers are expected to adhere to the traffic laws and speed limits in the state in which they are traveling. Each driver should have no more than two (2) hours of straight driving without stopping for a break.
- ◆ It is recommended that the driver(s) and young people should join in praying the Prayer of Protection before beginning a trip.
- ◆ It is the responsibility of the driver and young people to make each sure vehicle is cleaned up after each trip.
- ◆ Failure to comply with the above guidelines will disqualify individuals from driving for any further activities.

### **Background Checks**

The Senior Minister and Church Operations Manager should at all times endeavor to consult with Youth and Family staff and volunteers to ensure that a safe environment is maintained for those children or young persons in its temporary care. This oversight includes ensuring that annual background checks are made on all volunteers or paid staff serving the Youth and Family ministry.

### **Volunteers**

All prospective and current Youth Education volunteers must agree to abide by the Church's policies for volunteers.

Prospective volunteers wishing to work with minors should have attended Unity of Naples for at least six months.

Any individual wishing to be involved with any activity involving a minor will be required to sign a release form allowing Unity of Naples to conduct annual criminal **background checks** (as required by the Church insurance company).

All volunteer applications and background checks are confidential, and are held in the Operations Manager's office.

## **Teacher/Volunteer Supervision**

Youth Education teachers work under the direction and supervision of the Youth Education Director(s). Teachers may be asked to participate in teacher training, or to attend regional Youth Education workshops to support their ministry.

## **Safe Environment**

Our responsibility to our children:

Unity of Naples is strongly committed to providing quality spiritual educational programs to the children and youth of our Congregation, under the direction of well-trained Youth Education leaders, in an environment that is both physically and emotionally safe for all children and youth. Sadly, churches have not always been safe places for children. The Sexual abuse and exploitation of children and youth occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. Within our society, the issues of child abuse and neglect cut across all economic, cultural, and racial lines.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of every adult member of this Congregation to make Unity of Naples a place where children and youth may unfold and discover their own Divinity as unique children of God, safe from all forms of abuse and neglect.

In the light of this responsibility, Unity of Naples establishes the following policy:

As a community of faith, and as a Unity congregation, Unity of Naples pledges to conduct its Ministry in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth. We pledge:

- ◆ to follow reasonable precautionary measures in the selection and recruitment of child and Youth Education leaders and volunteers;
- ◆ to implement prudent operational procedures in all youth programs and events;
- ◆ to provide quality training for all our education leaders and volunteers regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline);
- ◆ to create and implement a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse in conformity with the requirements of state law;
- ◆ to be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs, and
- ◆ to recognize the caring role assumed with the consent of parents and legal guardians.

## **CONCLUSION**

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this Congregation is committed to the

demonstration of the Christ Love so that each child may be surrounded by deep love and acceptance and to be protected, nurtured, and supported in all aspects of their physical, emotional and spiritual growth.

## NURSERY/PRESCHOOL PROCEDURES

### **Procedures:**

The staff member or volunteer responsible for the Nursery room for a specific Sunday shall be present in the Nursery room and available to greet the children and parents/guardians 15 minutes before the 10:00am service begins (9:45 am)

The Nursery staff member(s)/volunteer(s) is (are) to remain in the Nursery area, if requested to do so, even if there are no children present.

Only individuals with prior permission are allowed to drop and pick up each child.

A check-in book is to be used to sign in and sign out each child. Siblings may not sign a child out.

Children are picked up in the Sanctuary after the Sunday service ends. Children should be handed over to parents, or approved persons.

No child is to be left unattended, or with only one adult present, at any time on Church premises, or in any Church-sponsored activity.

All visits outside the nursery room are to be supervised by at least two adults.

Only family members of children in the Nursery and designated staff/volunteers may enter the Nursery room when children are present.

Unity curriculum, or simple, age-appropriate activities, shall be prepared for the children (these can be supplied by the Youth Education Department), and the children are to be engaged with the Nursery staff member(s) or approved volunteers for the time that they are there.

The Youth Education Director, or Nursery teacher/attendant, reserves the right to refuse to accept a child into the Nursery area if that child is obviously ill, for the sake of the other children present.

### **Drop-off Procedures** (As each child is dropped off.)

A Parent-Child information sheet for each child must be filled out if there is not one already on file. This information should be updated when necessary. Medical conditions such as allergies are to be noted and kept on file, as well as emergency information. Beepers are to be checked out to parents or guardians for infants and/or children as deemed fit by a staff member or volunteer

Each parent/guardian is to receive a copy of the Church Nursery Procedures.



Parents will be called back to the Nursery if the child:

- Is overly distressed;
- Has very disruptive behavior;
- Becomes ill.

Parents, or approved persons, must pick children up immediately following the service. Parents are responsible for their children while on Church premises, except when in the custody of Youth Education staff or approved volunteers.

These Procedures also apply to Nursery/childcare for Special Events sponsored by the Church

## YOUTH EDUCATION TEACHER PROCEDURES

All staff members responsible for their classrooms shall be present in the classroom to greet children and parents at 9:45am.

The Youth Education greeter for that day shall arrive at 9:45 am, and remain in place until 10:10 am, to welcome and direct latecomers to the appropriate location.

Registration forms are to be used to sign in new students. The Youth Education director(s) are to notify staff and volunteers of any specific forms not currently updated.

A weekly attendance notebook is to be kept up. A master check-in book is to be used to sign each child in and out. Siblings may not sign a child in or out. Volunteers and staff shall sign in on the class page in the attendance notebook as well as students.

Children are picked up in the Sanctuary after the Sunday service ends. Children are to be handed over to parents or approved persons, and signed out of the attendance notebook.

No child is to be unattended.

Unity Worldwide Ministries approved curriculum and related appropriate activities should be prepared by each teacher on a weekly basis.

Staff members should notify Youth Education Directors in a timely manner if they will not be able to teach or find a suitable substitute. Volunteers and staff members are responsible for informing the Director of any changes in their contact information.

Teachers and assistants are to:

- ◆ Attend staff meetings to be announced by the Youth Education Directors. At that time, lessons are reviewed and craft and art needs discussed. Reliable attendance of all staff members is expected.
- ◆ Provide physical, emotional, and spiritual support and stimulation to each child in their care.
- ◆ Develop a relationship of trust, unconditional love, and continuity with each child in their care, which will enhance each child's development of positive self-image.
- ◆ Attend periodic training and education events provided by the Church.
- ◆ Maintain a positive, nurturing and safe environment for each child.

Teachers are responsible for reporting to the Youth Education Directors ongoing disruptive behavior by any student in their class.

Teachers are responsible for informing the Youth Education Directors of any supplies needed, including teaching materials.

## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Prevention is the best tool for behavioral issues. A key part of prevention is the Heart Agreements, which are the first step in establishing what is appropriate behavior in the classroom. If direct discipline of a child or young person is required, care must be taken not to embarrass or physically punish them. Staff or Volunteers should observe a specific series of procedures (see below) when disciplining children or young persons in their care.

**The following procedures are to be used in the order shown. Every effort is to be used to solve the challenge before moving to the next level.**

1. **Teachers:** Inappropriate behavior should be handled in the classroom first. Appropriate strategies include ignoring behavior, gentle reminders, offering choices, times-out, and quiet one-on-one talks.
2. **Youth Education Director(or Co-Director):** The Youth Education Director may remove the child from the room if necessary. He/she will use similar or additional strategies as listed above (1).
3. **Parents:** The Youth Education Director may request that parents pick up their child, or invite them to further discuss the issue. Teachers and assistants are not to contact parents on their own unless directed.
4. **Minister:** If misbehavior continues or escalates, and the parents are unable or unwilling to address the issue, the Youth Education Director may notify and confer with the Senior Minister to determine the best way to handle the situation.

## SAFEGUARDING PROCEDURES

It is the goal of Unity of Naples to make our campus a safe place for our children, Youth Education workers and volunteers. Additionally, Unity of Naples seeks to safeguard itself against any allegations or claim of child abuse.

According to the Florida Department of Children and Families:

“Abuse” means any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual injury or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child’s physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. Abuse of a child includes acts or omissions. Corporal discipline of a child by a parent or legal custodian for disciplinary purposes does not in itself constitute abuse when it does not result in harm to the child.

**Everyone in Florida is a mandated reporter of suspected abuse**, but some people are “professionally mandated reporters,” and required by Florida law to report. Professionally mandated reporters provide their name, which is entered into the record of the report, but is held confidential. The statute can be viewed here:

<http://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2011/39.201>.

Everyone should contact the Florida Abuse Hotline when they **know or have reasonable cause** to suspect that a child or a vulnerable adult has been abused, abandoned, neglected, or exploited. The Abuse Hotline Counselor will determine if the information provided meets legal requirements to accept a report for investigation.

Florida Department of Children and Families telephone hotline (24 hours) **1-800-962-2873**.  
For the hearing impaired: **1-800-453-5145**.

When reporting, the following information will be needed:

- ◆ Name, age, and gender of child.
- ◆ Address and phone number of child.
- ◆ Description of suspected abuse or neglect.
- ◆ Current condition of the child.

If you are an adult serving the children at Unity of Naples and suspect child abuse, the following actions are required in addition to contacting the Department of Children and Families:

1. If the child is in immediate danger, **call 911**
2. Immediately contact the **Director(s) of Youth and Family Ministry**.
3. If the Youth Education Director is not available, contact the **Senior Minister**.
4. Be prepared to complete an **Incident Report** in writing.