

# **Youth Ministry Policies and Procedures HANDBOOK**

**YOUTH MINISTRY POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL | SHARON CHURCH  
CREATED FOR 2023-24 SCHOOL YEAR**

# Sharon Church YOUTH MINISTRY

## Middle School / High School

### POLICY & PROCEDURE MANUAL

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# Philosophy of the Youth Ministry

## Purpose & Objective

Sharon Church Youth Ministry exists to reconcile a culture of nobodies to tell everybody about somebody. We do this by following the mission statement of the church set forth by Sharon Church.

The purpose for establishing a Youth Protection Policy is to demonstrate our clear commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of our youth. Sharon Church also recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy to (1) prevent the occurrence and/or appearance of abuse of our youth, (2) protect our adults from false accusations and/or suspicions, (3) protect the reputation and financial and emotional well-being of the entire church.

## Core Values & Expectations

**Parents will take the primary responsibility for discipleship of children (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Ephesians 6:1-4)**

- The primary minister in a young person's life is his/her parents. While it is true that youth ministry is important, its role is not to assume the responsibility God has entrusted to the parents. Therefore, the staff of the Youth Ministry will seek to partner with parents to support them in accomplishing the task God has given them. We will not usurp the parents' role, but come along side to support, encourage and love them in this process.

**The word of God will be the foundation of all that we do (2 Tim 4:1-2; James 1:22-24; Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; John 17:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:12)**

- The Holy Spirit uses the Bible to transform lives. Without the centrality of scripture, ministry loses its focus and, as a result, opportunities for lasting spiritual impact are diminished or lost. Therefore, from start to finish, Scripture will remain foundational and permeate all that we do.

**The gospel of Christ will be the primary message. (John 14:1-6; Acts 4:12)**

- Games, events, and craziness of all kinds is great, but only when they work to accomplish the ultimate goal- saving faith in Christ Jesus. For this reason, all that we do will be designed with Christ-likeness in mind. Our goal is not to entertain our young people or have the coolest, most cutting edge ministry in town, but to remain true to the gospel, trusting that God can and will change lives. We will do this by never assuming that our young people already have a sufficient understanding of the gospel and never exhorting the students to obey God's word apart from the gospel.

**The church is the body of Christ and the youth ministry will learn and submit to the overall purposes of the church. (1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:1-16; Colossians 3:15; Titus 2:6-8; 1 Peter 5:1-5)**

- The youth ministry is not a separate church. Youth ministry exists under the umbrella of Christ as the head of the Church, and the elders who shepherd the local church. Accordingly, we will teach our youth what the Bible says about their responsibility to the church as a whole and encourage them to be involved in the local church.

**Every young person will be encouraged to pursue accountability relationships where they can learn and grow alongside other believers (Luke 6:12-13; Matthew 18:15-20; Phil 3:17; Hebrews 3:13)**

- There shouldn't be any "lone ranger" Christians. The Christian life is not to be lived in isolation. God has given believers the Body of Christ as a support system. For this reason we seek to connect our young people to mature believers for the purpose of discipleship and accountability.

**We will speak the truth in love while being patient with all believers in the process of spiritual growth (1 Corinthians 3:5-8; Ephesians 5:17-24; Philippians 2:12-13; Romans 6:4; 2 Ti 4:2).**

- There are differences between justification, sanctification and glorification. In justification God declares sinners righteous by crediting them with the perfect righteousness of Christ. This free gift is received by faith alone. Sanctification is the process by which the holy spirit of God works godliness into the hearts and lives of believers. Glorification comes when we see Jesus face to face and are transformed into His very image. Whereas justification and glorification are instantaneous, sanctification is an on-going process that will never be fully completed or fully realized in this life. As with all of us, no young person will ever be without sin on this earth. Therefore, we will seek to be patient with all young people in the process of spiritual growth, believing that “He who began a good work in them will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6 – paraphrased)

**There will be no semblance of favoritism within the ministry because all young people matter to God (Psalm 139:13-16; Luke 15; Luke 19:10; Romans 5:8; 1 Timothy 1:15-17; James 2:1-5; 2 Peter 3:9)**

- Each young person is fearfully and wonderfully made and unique in God’s eyes. Regardless of dress, lifestyle, or personal background, God loves each young person equally. Therefore, we will seek to demonstrate that same love through fairness and impartiality. We will encourage each young person to interact freely and openly with each other, while discouraging “cliques” of any kind. We will remain equally accessible to everyone.

## **II. Youth Protection Policies**

### **Application**

This policy is applicable to all individuals having direct contact with the youth of Sharon Church, including but not limited to, pastors, staff, teachers, volunteers, chaperones, and drivers.

### **Definitions**

#### **Inappropriate Displays of Affection**

- Any form of sexual contact or contact perceived as stimulating
- Intimate kissing
- Initiating full frontal hugs or “bear hugs”
- Massages
- Lying down or sleeping beside youth
- Tickling or wrestling
- Touching or hugging from behind
- Showing affection in isolated/inappropriate areas such as bedrooms, closets, restricted or private rooms.
- Comments that relate to physique or body development
- Patting on the thigh, knee or leg
- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Piggyback rides

#### **Appropriate Displays of Affection**

- Use of appropriate physical contact in a public setting to show support, encouragement and healthy affection toward youth who are receptive to this form of emotional expression is acceptable. However, adults must exercise good judgment and never force any physical contact on any youth. Examples of appropriate displays of affection may include:
  - Holding hands during prayers or when a person is upset
  - Side-hugs
  - Holding hands while walking with small children
  - Hand-shakes
  - High-fives, hand slaps and fist bumps
  - Verbal praise
  - Arms around shoulders
  - Pats on the shoulder/back

#### **Appropriate discipline**

Adults will employ only positive methods of discipline and guidance that encourages, builds self-esteem, self-control and self-direction. Examples of positive discipline include:

- Use praise and encouragement of good behavior instead of focusing only upon unacceptable behavior
  - Reminding youth of behavior expectations by using clear, positive statements
  - Redirecting behavior using positive statements
  - Using brief supervised separation or time out from the group, when appropriate for the youth’s age and development.

**Harsh, cruel or unusual treatment under the guise of discipline is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.**

## **Guidelines**

### **General**

Adults involved in Sharon Church youth activities must assume the full burden for setting and maintaining clear and appropriate physical and emotional boundaries in all youth ministry relationships.

- Two Adult Rule – Every attempt should be made for two or more adults are to be present during any Sharon Church sponsored youth activity. If one-on-one interactions between adults and youth are unavoidable or absolutely necessary, the interaction should occur in an area that is visible to others and with the knowledge of another adult. Where application of this rule is not possible or practical (e.g. emergencies) a “roaming adult” should be utilized.

- Proportional Adult Coverage/Supervision It is recommended that there be a minimum of 1 adult per 10 youth for high school level activities, 1 Adult per 7 youth for middle school age activities. Per the two-adult rule, no activity will have less than two adults, preferably one male and one female if mixed gender youth are participating.

### **Transport (During a Youth Event, Not to and From)**

All youth must ride in vehicles driven by authorized adults which must:

- Be at least 21 years old (18 if needed)
- Have a valid Georgia driver's license, qualified for the vehicle being operated.
- Have no record of convictions for the past five years for DUI, driving with a suspended or revoked drivers license or reckless endangerment.
- Have proof of insurance
- Never be alone in a vehicle with a youth other than his/her own child or sibling.

Therefore, no fewer than three persons, one of them an adult, should occupy a vehicle traveling to/from an activity.

- Ensure vehicles are not filled beyond capacity for their use, that seat belts are always secured and that occupants behave.

- Must understand emergency contact procedures and maintain contact with the person in charge (e.g. cell phone)

- If a youth chooses to ride with another minor during a church function explicit consent must be made by the parent of that child to the Youth Director.

### **Transport (Before and After Youth Event)**

- To remain above reproach, it is our practice to not have volunteers give rides alone to students of the opposite sex. In extenuating circumstances it is possible that such rides might be reasonably allowed, but only after obtaining the advance knowledge and permission of the parent/guardian. However, this should be a rare exception.

- Students can ride to church or home from church with other students, but this is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to monitor. We cannot be responsible for students before they arrive at a youth activity or after they leave.

## **Overnight Events**

- Care needs to be taken to ensure that there is a clean, safe environment provided for sleeping, showering, bathing, dressing and all other aspects of being away for a period of time. Adults must always respect the privacy of youth and each other. Likewise youth must respect the privacy of adults and each other.

- When the youth group includes both males and females, and stays overnight, both male and female adults must be present. (This also applies to overnight stays at Sharon Church)

- Only Sharon Church and associated church group, youth and adults participating in the trip, are allowed to stay in the same accommodations.

- Sleeping areas and access to bathroom facilities should be segregated between males and females. Every sleeping unit (hotel room, dorm room, cabin, tent, etc) should have either two adults of the same gender as the youth, or no adults assigned to it. In the rarest of cases when only one adult is available, the sleeping unit must have at least two youth of the same gender as the adult. Adults are not allowed to share a bed with a youth unless it is their own child. If absolutely necessary, beds may be shared by youth of the same gender. If separate bathroom facilities are not available, times for male and female and youth/adults use should be scheduled and posted prominently.

- When one room is used for sleeping, youth and adults of the opposite gender will sleep an appropriate distance apart as determined by the adult in charge.

- Both youth and adults shall wear appropriate sleeping apparel.

- In booking hotel rooms, reservations should be made, if possible, with all rooms on the same floor or location in the hotel. Adjacent rooms allow for enhanced supervision and safety.

- No youth(s) should be allowed to leave the premises without authorized and appropriate adult supervision.

- Curfews must be established and adhered to by all participants.

## **Exceptional Situations**

- Only under the rarest and most unusual circumstances should an adult be alone in a car, room, or other accommodation with a youth. This might include a case where a youth is ill or in a bona fide medical emergency. In this case, the adult should make every effort to enlist the help of another youth or adult to be present and assist. Note however, the welfare of the youth takes precedence and whatever action is necessary and appropriate must be taken.

- If there is a unique need for an adult to talk with a youth in private, the adult should choose a quiet place that is in plain, public view. Examples of this may include open areas around the church (courtyards or hotel lobbies if on a trip), short walks down a sidewalk, a restaurant or other location where people are present in the area.

- Adults need to acknowledge that there is potential for sexual abuse and/or harassment by outside parties and must take reasonable and appropriate steps to ensure the safety and well-being of all youth.

### **Arrival and Departure Times**

- We will promote a clear departure and an arrival time for most events. We will always strive to return earlier than the stated arrival time, so parents/guardians should be ready to pick kids up by then. Rarely should we be late.
- It's important to us not to waste time waiting for kids to be picked up and it's important to parents/guardians not to have to wait around for us to arrive.
- In the event that it appears we will be 30 minutes late or more due to an unforeseen event—if possible— we will call ahead so parents aren't waiting and wondering.
- Certain local events such as a concert or ball game are uncertain in their ending times. In such cases we will suggest the kids call home when we arrive at church or use cell phones enroute.
- For long-distance trips where the return time may vary depending on road conditions, we will send out emails, TXT180, or other updates via facebook for parents/guardians to check.

### **Safety**

- Students will generally be required to stay in groups of four or more in all public places (amusement parks, water parks, campgrounds, etc.) They must also be in the vicinity of a chaperone while in their group of four.
- We will particularly keep close tabs on Middle School students. Depending on the setting, older students will be given more latitude.
- During events and when transporting students from one location to another face-to-face attendance taking will be taken often to verify everyone's presence. Parents/Guardians will be notified if students have removed themselves from our activity.

### **Screening**

- Each volunteer is required to complete an application process which includes a personal interview and a criminal background check.
- Each volunteer must be a member of Sharon Church and be at least 18 years of age.
- Each volunteer must acknowledge and agree with Sharon Church Youth Ministries Vision and Mission Statement.

### **Training/Continuing Education**

- Volunteers will attend One (1) mandatory training session per year.
- Each volunteer will be expected to complete MinistrySafe Training.

### **PDA**

To avoid awkwardness, cliques, and distracting from the purpose of our trip, we do not allow PDA (public displays of affection) between couples, unless you are married - in which case it is required. Our trip is not a date; it is a group experience, where we treat each other equally as brothers and sisters. This means couples may not hold hands, cuddle, lay on one another, isolate themselves, etc.



## **Reporting**

- Any person, adult or youth, must be ready to safeguard and protect the trust and safety of children and youth. Anyone who has “reason to believe” or evidence that a child/youth is a victim of abuse or neglect has a duty to report. This duty to report is not limited to events or activities at Sharon Church or under our supervision. A failure to report can be considered a criminal offense and potentially subject to civil liability.

- Sharon Church understands that appropriate government agencies must respond and investigate reports of abuse/neglect of a child/youth to the Georgia Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). Sharon Church will at all times fully cooperate with such governmental agencies, and in no way attempt to interfere in or obstruct such agencies or their investigations. Response and reporting to the DFPS is summarized on their form 7261.

- If anyone is unsure whether an incident or condition should be reported, they should feel free to discuss the circumstances with the Youth Director or Pastor. Additionally, Sharon Church asks that if an incident or condition is reported to the DFPS, that The Youth Director and the Pastor be notified of the situation.

## **Counseling**

Bear in mind, Youth Ministry volunteers are not professional counselors.

Consequently this occasionally poses a significant boundary issue when working with young people. As they begin to trust the Youth Ministry Staff, they will begin to confide in them. Problems arise when a young person confides in a volunteer, expecting them to maintain confidentiality. Unfortunately, not all counseling issues can remain confidential.

Youth Ministry volunteers are required to report immediately to the Youth Pastor if: Youth Ministry

- A young person is being abused sexually
- A young person is threatening to hurt him/herself (suicide, cutting, etc)
- A young person is threatening to hurt someone else (homicide, revenge, etc)
- A young person reveals a personal crisis/endangerment (pregnancy, drug abuse addictions, criminal activity, etc).

If any of these situations arise, the Youth Director will take the appropriate course of action, including the consulting of authorities and/or parents or pursuing professional counseling options. The Youth Pastor is available to give counsel and guidance on any issues or concerns that arise.

Because we are dealing with minors, we will use the utmost discretion as to who to involve in various issues. We desire to build trust with our young people, but not to the extent of keeping parents excluded from their child's life.

## **Care of Documents**

- All information will be treated in a confidential manner, except as required by legal reporting requirements or legal process. Documents will be kept in secure storage available only to those charged in this policy with the responsibilities requiring direct access to information within their purview. This secure storage will house all Screening Forms, Applications, Volunteer Acknowledgement Forms and any other sensitive information related to youth protection.

## **Dress Code**

- Modesty is of supreme importance and all youth participants should consider their outfits prior to attending any event.
  - For guys this includes, but not limited to, shirts cut all the way down on the side, too short or shorts, too tight of shorts/pants, and having no shirt on at all.
  - For girls this includes, but not limited to,
- Clothes with inappropriate messages or images are not permitted
- When in doubt, don't wear it. Short shirts or skirts, low tops, etc., are best left at home.
- Youth Leaders have the right to send students home for inappropriate clothing/outfits.

## **Injury & First Aid**

- We can administer ONLY basic first aid, in non-life threatening situations.
- The Youth Director can be charged with giving students medication during a youth trip. A note from the parent must accompany the medication noting the Youth Director as able to distribute medication.

## **Forms/Releases**

- Medical Forms, Insurance Forms, Parental Consent/Permission Slips, Waivers & Releases, Power of Attorney Forms, etc., will be filed, maintained and secured in the church office.

## **Financial Coverage Distinctions between Chaperones/Parents/Student Interns**

- 1.1 Chaperones are needed with an expanded roster or students
- 2.1 A Chaperone will be classified as someone who is asked by the Youth Director to participate in an event/trip
- 2.2 To be asked as a Chaperone specific qualifications for certain trips must be met.
  - Ministry Safe Certified
  - Background Check
  - Able to drive rental car (if applicable to event)
- 2.3 Chaperone spots are first available to those who participate weekly with students
- 3.1 Parents are encouraged to attend youth trips/events but their trips/events will not be covered by the church.
- 3.2 A Parent can also be a Chaperone if they meet the criteria of 2.1 & 2.2

## **Financial Aid**

- Financial Aid will be considered on a case by case basis

## **Disciplinary Actions**

- Disciplinary action may need to take place while on church premises, and/or at a church sponsored function. The policy outlined below will be handled without favoritism, and is a way for us to partner with parents in this process.
  1. First time we need to address a problem, we will speak to the student. We first want to go to them to allow them to change their behavior on their own.
  2. Second time we need to address a problem, we will be reaching out to parents letting them know about the continued problems we have had, and ask for help in addressing them.
  3. Third time we need to address a problem, we will ask the student to sit out one week from Wednesday Night Activities.

4. Fourth time we need to address a problem, we will have a meeting with the student and parents as we figure out the best course of action, which may include being asked to take a few weeks off of Wednesday Night Activities, and meeting with the director/pastor about the problems.
5. If we still have problems with a student, we may then ask student to not participate for the foreseeable future at Wednesday Night Activities, and may ask their parents to be present with them on these nights if they choose to come.

### **Social Media (Volunteers and Leaders)**

- Social Media presence will be held to the same standard as a follower of Jesus. This includes, but not limited to, nothing that promotes hate to any person/race/gender/sexual orientation/etc., alcohol/drugs, and inappropriate language including songs.
  - Failure to do so will result in disciplinary actions including, but not limited to:
    1. First, a talk with the director/pastor.
    2. Second time, asked to step back for a week.
    3. Third time, take some time off, and meeting with the director/pastor
    4. Fourth time, asking to leave the ministry, and a meeting with the director/pastor and the teaching and administrative pastor.

### **Drugs and Alcohol**

- Drugs and Alcohol are NEVER permitted on church property, or on any church sponsored/sanctioned trip.
- Leaders/volunteers are held to a higher standard and should aware of this. Leaders and volunteers should not be engaging with Alcohol until the legal age of 21, and even then should live under the authority of God. We should treat our bodies well, which includes drunkenness and drug use.
  - Failure to do so will result in disciplinary actions including, but not limited to:
    5. First, a talk with the director/pastor.
    6. Second time, asked to step back for a week.
    7. Third time, take some time off, and meeting with the director/pastor
    8. Fourth time, asking to leave the ministry, and a meeting with the director/pastor and the teaching and administrative pastor.

### **Weather Cancellations**

- If on a school day, we will cancel an event if HCSD (Henry County School District) has cancelled classes for students.
- If on a weekend or non-school day we will cancel an event if an Ice or Snow warning has been put in place by the National Weather Association. In event of Thunderstorm or Tornado warning, those will be dealt with on a case by case basis.
- If an Ice or Snow warning is put in place during a Youth event, students will immediately be sent home.
- As for a Flood Warning, cancellation of a Youth event will be called on a case by case basis.

## **Communication**

- Parents/Guardians are encouraged to come and participate in our youth activities at any time.
- E-mail is our primary communication vehicle. We have an extensive database of addresses and we regularly send out information updates to parents/guardians, students and/or sponsors. If you don't have e-mail, the best thing is to find someone who regularly checks email and have them give the information to you.
- In High School we utilize Facebook for announcements to those who are members of "Sharon High School Students" facebook group.
- In Middle School we utilize Facebook for announcements to those who are members of "Sharon Middle School Students" facebook group.
- Text message are also sent to those with cell phones through TXT180 unless they indicate otherwise.
- Flyers will often be available for special events.

Questions or concerns about our Youth ministry communication can be directed to Donna Lynn at [donna@sharonchurch.com](mailto:donna@sharonchurch.com)

## **Videos, Movies & Music**

We sometimes utilize videos, movies and music in our youth group events. But rather than using them as mere mindless entertainment, we emphasize the importance of thinking Christianly about our media choices. These forms of media can be great opportunities for discussions of truth. We'll do our best to show appropriate content as a way to honor the standards of parents/guardians, and where sin is depicted, we will ensure that it is put in its proper context in accordance with the truth of Scripture. If you have any questions or concerns about media choices, please let us know.

## **Cell Phones**

- Cell phones will not be allowed out during worship, lesson, or small group times.
- We believe cell phones are a distraction to what the Holy Spirit is teaching us. We will have physical bibles available for students and leaders to use, as well as notebooks for students and leaders to take notes.
- Cell phones may be used during designated hangout times, but we highly encourage students to be present in the moment.

## IV. VOLUNTEER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

### **Volunteer Acknowledgement**

The Youth Ministry Handbook/Policy & Procedures Manual contains important information about Sharon Church. I understand that I should consult the Youth Director if I have any questions that are not answered in this handbook.

I also acknowledge that revisions to this handbook may occur at any time.

My signature below acknowledges that I have received and read this entire handbook/manual.

My signature also indicates that I agree to serve faithfully and to comply with and adhere to the policies and procedures outlined in this handbook/manual.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Youth Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date