

## Youth Ministry Policy

2019

This policy statement is designed to provide a climate of safety so that spiritual growth can happen organically. These policies are meant as guidelines for the safety of students and to protect the integrity of adult leaders. They should never be used as a substitute for common sense. Policies can be updated at the discretion of the Youth Ministry Staff, with the acknowledgement of the Elders.

### A. Volunteer Requirements

1. Background Checks
2. Youth Ministry Covenant
  - a. All Youth Ministry Volunteer Leaders must sign and agree to the Youth Ministry Covenant.

### B. Privacy/Confidentially statement

*It is vital that the students in the ministry at Atlanta Christian Church have the ability to speak freely about issues that are affecting their lives. To that end, any information provided to a minister or adult leader by a student **WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL** unless the following occur:*

1. The student gives express permission (either oral or written) to share the information with other concerned adults.
2. The student (or someone the student knows) is in immediate physical danger.
3. The student reports any type of abuse or behavior requiring the actions of an outside agency (police, DCFS, school authorities, hospital staff).

### C. Leader Procedures

#### C1). Incident/Injury report

1. If any discipline is issued beyond a verbal warning, such as dismissal from an event, or if there is a student or adult injury during a church-sanctioned event, an Incident/Injury report will be filed immediately with the Elders. This process will be initiated by the volunteer leader contacting the Youth Leader as soon as possible after the incident or injury occurs.
2. Incident/Injury Reports are kept in the Church Office.
3. The incident report will be filled out completely. Other witnesses to the event may be asked to submit a version of events, which will be attached to the file.
4. Parents of any student involved in an incident report will be notified that this report is on record and is available for their review. Information concerning individuals not directly related to the incident will not be disclosed.

#### C2). Removal of volunteers

1. It is necessary on occasion to remove a volunteer from a position of service in the Youth Ministry. Atlanta Christian Church is committed to maintaining respect and confidentiality for all individuals involved.
2. Volunteers may be removed from service for two reasons:

- a. The church leadership determines that their giftedness, personality and/or temperament are deemed not to be compatible with the goals and expectations of the Youth Ministry. If such a problem develops, an Elder team will meet directly with the individual and provide an opportunity for a fair hearing as well as provide options to allow the person to remain in that ministry if the individual desires to do so. If this hearing and subsequent attempt to resolve the issue fails, then the volunteer may be removed at the discretion of the Youth Director. Any volunteer who feels that he/she has been treated unfairly may confer with the administrative minister and elders for additional guidance.
- b. There is a direct violation of the law or our Youth Ministry guidelines. The nature of the violation will determine our course of action regarding notification of parents or legal authorities. An incident report will be filed with the Elders.

### C3). Removal of Students

1. If a student violates the law in any form, the ministers have the right to permanently ban the student from the premises.
2. No types of sexually explicit or graphic literature, clothing, etc. are allowed. If brought onto church property the student will be ask to remove the items from the property or to return home to change into acceptable clothing.
3. No alcohol, tobacco of any kind, or illegal drugs are allowed if brought onto church property or to a church sponsored event, the items will be confiscated and returned to a parent after discussion with the Youth Leader. The student will be banned from the property for a period of time determined by the Youth Leader and Elders and will not be allowed to return until after a parent/minister/elder meeting.
4. Students fighting with one another will not be tolerated. Those fighting will be banned from church property/events pending a parent/minister/elder meeting.

### D. Physical Touch

1. Extreme care should be observed in how any volunteer or student touches any other student or volunteer in the ministry. Positive contact (one-arm hugs, hand on the shoulders, holding hands during prayer time) should be stressed.
2. Students and adults are to avoid all negative contact (kissing, lap-sitting, back rubs).
3. At no time is physical discipline ever to be used on any other person in the ministry, excluding physical restraint.
4. Physical restraint will only be used as a last resort to protect all the students and leaders (including the student, if such action would lead to their own harm). If physical restraint of a student ever becomes necessary, the parent will be notified immediately of the action and an incident report will be filed with the Elders.
5. Adults must be accountable to each other for proper supervision of students AND OTHER ADULT VOLUNTEERS AND LEADERSHIP for inappropriate touch or behavior. Any

inappropriate behavior must be addressed immediately with the offender and reported directly to the Elders.

6. Adults should never be alone with a student. This includes the necessary or incidental transportation of ministry students. Let's say it again; adults should never be alone with a student. This is for the protection of everyone.

#### **E. Conduct Issues Involving Students, Parents, and Volunteers**

1. Parents are strongly encouraged to know the teachers and leaders who are working with their teens. PARENTS ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND ANY YOUTH GROUP EVENT AT ANY TIME. Parents are asked to observe and not disrupt services. If a parent disapproves of any activity at youth group, they are welcome to discuss this with the youth leader AFTER the event. If the parent disrupts the service, they will be asked to leave, and they have the right to take their child with them. In the event of a small-group accountability session, the parent will be expected to respect the student's right to privately share with his/her spiritual peers.
2. In the event of INJURY or ILLNESS, every reasonable attempt will be made to contact the parent immediately. Unless the injury or illness is critical, it will be the parent's responsibility to either pick up the teen if the situation warrants, or arrange for professional medical care. If the situation is critical, every step will be taken to stabilize the teen while the parents are being contacted. This is why it is imperative that all students in the ministry have an updated (once per year) medical liability form on file. A leader or volunteer on staff will fill out an incident report with the Eldership.
3. If a parent has a serious concern about a volunteer or a ministry in general that cannot be resolved through direct dialogue with the particular volunteer or ministry leader, it is the parent's responsibility to contact the church Eldership. The Youth Leader will keep a record of the issue (description of the problem, time and date problem occurred, date the leader was notified, and any action if appropriate). The volunteer is encouraged to communicate regularly with the eldership regarding relationships with students and parents. The Youth Ministry team is a full supporter of both our ministry team volunteers and our students and their families. Our staff wants to be open and available to all. Of course, this resolution applies to all relationships. If a volunteer has concerns about a parent or ministry leader, it is the volunteer's responsibility to communicate directly to resolve the matter.
4. In the event of a conflict in which the Youth Leader is notified, the minister will contact the volunteer(s) and/or parents involved to discuss their perception of events. If necessary, a facilitation meeting will be scheduled between the parent(s) and the volunteer(s) to bring closure to the issue. Elders and other ministry staff may be made aware of the issue at this time in order that they may provide Godly input.
5. In the event the situation cannot be resolved, the elders will be consulted for arbitration. Their word on the subject is final.

6. In the event the situation or conflict is against the Youth Leader or another staff member, the Elders will have direct oversight in the matter. The Youth Leader reserves the right to have the Elders present during any and all facets of conflict resolution.
7. Our goal is to work together in harmony as one body. Our only debt is the continuing debt to love one another.

#### **F. Special Note: Student-to-Student Conflict Resolution**

*One of our key ministries will be in assisting our students in conflict resolution and reconciliation. Our example and involvement in this process could prove vital in a student's long-term spiritual health. In the event of a student-to-student peer conflict, the following policies will be emphasized.*

1. Upon discovering the conflict, the adult leader will discuss the situation privately (individually) with both parties to determine a complete account.
2. The adult leader will then facilitate a meeting between the parties. The Youth Leader will be notified immediately. This meeting should be girded with prayer and Biblical support for reconciliation.
3. Should reconciliation occur, the adult leader will provide the students with an opportunity to publicly affirm their reconciliation through a mutually agreed upon format (in the Bible study class, small group, etc). This will prevent rumor and gossip from undermining the process and serves to affirm a Biblical method of resolution.
4. Should resolution not occur, the adult leader and Youth Leader may at their discretion, bring in the parents and/or ministry staff to facilitate further discussion. If the issue poses an immediate threat to the physical health of any student, parents and the Youth Leader will be notified immediately. At this point, a formal incident report will be filed with the Elders.
5. Barring students from the campus or church-related programs is a serious decision that must be weighed carefully. Making this decision as a result of interpersonal conflict will be made with the best interest of all parties involved, and will contain significant input from the parent, student, Youth Leader, and Elders.

#### **G. Issue of Abuse**

1. Any concerns about the abuse of a student (whether that abuse is alleged by a person concerning a ministry staff member or volunteer; or is alleged by a ministry staff member or volunteer concerning another person) must be brought to the Youth Leader and Elders for verification first. If a student or adult brings a charge of abuse against any other student or adult, every effort will be made to investigate the claim before official action is begun. This rule is in place to protect the rights of all parties involved from frivolous actions.

2. The principles of conflict resolution listed above will be implemented first. If in the event it becomes necessary to contact law enforcement or DCFS, an Elders will make the initial contact. The parents of the student will be notified as soon as possible. The ministry staff and elders will also be made aware of the accusation as soon as possible. An incident report will be filed with the Elders.
3. If the claim of abuse involves a ministry staff volunteer, he/she will be temporarily relieved of duties should an investigation be deemed necessary. At no time will any party in the matter be spoken of poorly. Our primary command is love, and we will obey that command in this situation.
4. If an investigation is warranted, the chairman of the elders must immediately report the incident to the church's insurance company and attorney.
5. Confrontation of the accused party must balance the well-being of our students with the need for respect and due process.
6. The ministry staff and eldership, under direction of the church attorney, should jointly prepare statements to the press and congregation relating to such incidents, with the chairman of the elders, the Elders or his appointed spokesperson reading any such statements.
7. If the claim of abuse is proven false, the volunteer will be reinstated immediately and given the full and public support of the church leadership. This issue of reconciliation among all parties will be of paramount importance.
8. If the claim of abuse is substantiated, the proper authorities will be notified for further action as deemed appropriate. Church discipline will be handled through the Godly counsel of the eldership. The church leadership will prayerfully and pastorally support in Christ all parties involved.
9. If there is any claim of abuse against a ministry staff member, the Elders will conduct the investigation in conjunction with the chairman of the elders. Any decisions about the minister's activity and involvement in the ministry during the investigation will be determined by them.

### **I. In-campus Events**

1. Appropriate student/adult ratios should not be greater than 6/1. At least two adult certified volunteers should be present at all events. A certified person is one who has an active covenant on file with the church office, which means the person has both ministry staff and elder approval. When both male and female students are attending, the adult ratio should reflect both male and female participation.

### **J. Off-campus Events**

1. Off-campus events are defined as any church-initiated and church-sponsored activities for students that are conducted at a location other than the church campus.
2. Appropriate student/adult ratios should not be greater than 6/1. At least two certified adult volunteers should be present. A certified person is on who has an active covenant on file with the Youth Leader, which means both ministry staff and elder

approval. When both male and female students are attending, the adult ration should reflect both male and female participation.

3. A current medical liability form is required for any student under the age of 18 to participate in any off-campus event. Students who are 18 years of age or older must fill out the adult form.
4. Church volunteers are to provide transportation to and from off-campus special events, with the exception of events that have a local address as the original point of destination. For local events, transportation responsibility lies with the family and/or the student. *Students are not to drive to any non-local events.* For events where the church provides the transportation, all drivers must be at least 21 years of age, be listed on the church's insurance and have a valid drivers license for the vehicle they are driving (JO2 for the 15-passenger van). The number of passengers is not to exceed the number of seats available in the vehicle. The seat must have an operational seatbelt and the seatbelt must be worn.
5. For overnight stays, the student/adult ratio should be not greater than 4/1. No student is to be alone with another student or an adult volunteer at any point. Should it become necessary for two individuals to speak together privately, this conversation should be held in an open area with high visibility with coordination of the adult volunteers.
  - a. For hotel stays, at least one adult is to be in each room with a minimum of two students. No person of the opposite gender is to be in any room with a group of a different gender without at least one certified ministry adult volunteer present. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES are a male and female to be on the same bed, ever.
  - b. For larger group settings (in a home or other group sleepover scenario), proper supervision and ratios must be maintained. For choir tour and mission trips, adults will be screened and certified by the host church personnel. A parent wishing his/her child to stay with an adult from our church can make the request in writing within one week of leaving for tour. Their wishes will be respected inasmuch as it is in our power to do so.

## J. Emergency Procedures

Procedures are put into place in hopes that they will never be needed. Youth Ministry volunteers are asked to observe the emergency and evacuation procedures for the area in which they are located.

1. In the event of a fire the leaders and staff will do the following:
  - a. Evacuate the entire group out of the affected building to an outside location at least 100 feet from the structure. Those students in the youth center will gather in the lot across Third Street. Students will remain at their gathering position until the all-clear is given.

- b. If the fire is small enough to be extinguished by hand, adult personnel will take care of the situation and call 911. The students must be evacuated regardless of the size of the fire, for safety's sake.
  - c. Youth staff or emergency personnel will do a careful check of the building to make certain all students are out of the building.
  - d. No one will be allowed back into the building until emergency personnel have given an all-clear signal.
  - e. Youth Leaders and volunteer leaders will contact parents as soon as reasonably possible. Church leadership personnel will also be contacted.
  - f. If any student is injured to the point that emergency personnel need to be called, the emergency response team will render first aid. If deemed necessary by emergency personnel, the students will be evacuated to a hospital for further treatment. Parents will be contacted immediately.
  - g. An incident report will be filed with the Elders.
2. In the event of severe weather (hail, strong winds, threatening lightning, tornado sirens, etc.) or earthquake, all students and adult personnel will be moved to a place of safety immediately. If the severe weather occurs during an event on-campus, students will remain in the building (following emergency procedures for their particular area. Our current emergency location is in the lower level of our building). If the event occurs off-campus, students will go where the individual emergency procedures dictate. If the event occurs during transport, the vehicles will be routed to the nearest safe place and evacuated. If a student is injured, emergency procedures will apply, and the parent will be notified immediately. An incident report will be filed with the Elders.
3. In the event there are threats of violence, each threat will be taken seriously. If a bomb or other threat is phoned in, students will be evacuated unless doing so would put the students in danger. If a life-threatening weapon or device is brought onto the premises, students will be moved to a place of safety immediately. **If the threat is imminent, the staff will comply with the perpetrator's requests in order to protect the students.** Every attempt will be made to move the students to a safe location as soon as possible. A staff leader or volunteer will call 911. Parents will be notified as soon as reasonably appropriate, after the safety of the students is assured. An incident report will be filed with the Elders.
4. In the event of a missing child or student, students will be kept in their rooms to allow for a faster search. A description of the missing child or student will be given over a loudspeaker. Available adults in each room will be asked to watch access doors and check the building, parking areas, etc. If a student is missing for more than 10 minutes, the local police will be notified. The children's ministry has a check-in and checkout system to protect our kids. The Youth Ministry has a check-in system to let us know who is in the building. For our teens, we want them to know that this is not a prison. We cannot stop someone from leaving campus prior to the conclusion of an event. To

prevent the panic that comes with this situation, students who are leaving an event early must inform their adult leaders of their intentions.

#### K. Special Situations

1. **Driving - No staff member will drive any student home alone.** Exceptions can be made in the case of emergency or with the express permission of a parent.
2. **Meals** - When volunteer youth staff members have a one-on-one appointment with a student, this appointment will occur in a public place.
3. **Dating** - No one working in Youth Ministry may pursue a dating relationship with any student in the ministry. Youth staff members will be conscious of any student "crushes" and respond to them quickly and appropriately.
4. **Appointments** - No youth staff member will ever schedule an appointment with a student in the ministry at a place or time where the leader would be totally alone with the student (i.e. in the building after hours, at a home, etc.).
5. **Medications** - Youth Ministry leaders and volunteers cannot be responsible for the dispensing of prescription or over-the-counter medications. It is the student's responsibility to dispense his/her own medicine, and it is the parent's responsibility to inform the appropriate youth staff leader that the student is taking medication.
6. **Phones** - All programs will have access to an emergency phone, whether on the campus grounds or provided through a cell phone. For off-campus events, the emergency cell phone information will be printed in the final information letter prior to an event.
7. **Volunteer Expenses** - Any reasonable expenses incurred by a youth leader in the course of the ministry work (including, but not limited to, mileage, meals, curriculum, student benevolence) is reimbursable by the Youth Ministry. Receipts should be submitted to the Director of Youth and Family Ministry as soon as possible after the conclusion of an event. Reimbursements will be made according to current church policy.