

Dear Kingdom Kids Volunteer,

Thanks so much for your interest in the Agape Kingdom Kids children's program. We highly value you, our volunteers, and the ministry you provide to our children on Sundays. We also value our children and want to provide for them an environment that is safe and nurturing so that they can actively learn about the God who loves them.

We have established this Handbook, including our policies and procedures, to protect not only our children but also, you, our volunteers, and Agape's mission. These rules will be strictly enforced. It is therefore imperative that you know and observe the rules listed in this handbook.

After carefully reading this manual, including the parts that are specific to the ministry you are serving with, please sign and date the acknowledgement page and return it to Agape Family Fellowship.

Thank you again for serving in Agape Kingdom Kids! You are making a difference in God's Kingdom!

Sincerely,

Children's Ministry Director

Agape Family Fellowship Children’s Ministry Handbook

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

The purpose of this handbook is to provide policies and procedures for the Children's Ministry of Agape and the volunteers who work in that ministry. Changes may be made from time to time in the policies and procedures contained in this handbook without prior written or oral notice.

VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES

Vision

We invite all kids to know Christ in a way that transforms their daily lives and the lives of those around them.

Mission

We will actively help children pursue personal freedom with all our hearts.

Values

TRANSFORMATIONAL TRUTH

Allowing the Word of God to change your life! (John 8:32, 2 Timothy 3:16)

AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIP

Allow other people to know you for who God made you to be! (Acts 3:19, James 5:13 – 16)

MISSIONAL JOURNEY

Take the Good News, and the gifts God gave you, to others! (John 20:21, Matthew 28:18 – 20)

VOLUNTEER PROCESS

Because we love children and desire to protect them, Agape requires all volunteers working with children to complete the following steps:

1. Policies & Procedures

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.

2. Criminal Background Check

Agape uses and pays for the services of a reputable public data screening firm in order to check the background of all volunteers ages 18 & older for possible criminal history and/or registered sex offender information.

Individuals who have been arrested for, charged with, are on deferred adjudication or regular probation for, or have been convicted of sexually oriented or sex related crimes, either misdemeanor or felony, cannot serve in any area of children's ministry. Agape utilizes a comprehensive background check and relies upon the truthful answers of applicants for this information.

3. Interview

All Children's Ministry volunteers must be willing to submit to an interview by either the Pastor or Director.

Agape reserves the right to revoke any volunteer's ability to serve in the Children's Ministry with or without notice at any time for any reason deemed relevant by the Pastor or Director.

SECTION 2: CHILD ABUSE AND PROTECTION

POLICY AGAINST CHILD ABUSE

Agape supports and maintains a **zero tolerance** policy against child abuse and neglect. Child abuse and neglect include physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment, or maltreatment. Sexual abuse is defined as the use, persuasion, or coercion of any child to engage in any sexually explicit conduct (or any simulation of such conduct) for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct or rape, molestation, prostitution, or incest with children.

It is against the law and against Agape's policy for any volunteer or employed staff, male or female, to physically, sexually, or mentally abuse or neglect any child.

Agape will neither condone nor tolerate:

- Infliction of bodily injury upon any child or physically or sexually abusive behavior towards a child.
- Physical neglect of children, including failure to provide adequate safety measures, care, and supervision in relation to church activities.
- Emotional mistreatment of children, including verbal abuse and/or verbal attacks.

REPORTING AND INVESTIGATIONS

Child abuse is a serious crime, and Agape intends to prosecute child abuse in any form to the fullest extent of the law. You are under these obligations as a volunteer:

1. Reporting requirements

All volunteers and employees shall immediately report and document any incident of abuse or violation of the two-adult policy of which they have knowledge or which they have observed. Any person making such a report shall keep the information strictly confidential.

2. Incident of abuse defined

An "incident of abuse" means any occurrence in which any person:

- Has threatened to inflict or has inflicted physical injury upon a child, youth worker, or vulnerable adult, other than by accidental means, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
- Commits or allows to be committed any sexual offense against a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
- With respect to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult makes any kind of sexual advance, or makes a request for sexual favors, or engages in sexually motivated physical contact, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.

- Exposes a child, youth, or vulnerable adult to verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.

3. Imminent threat

In all cases where an imminent threat of continued or actual abuse exists, any witness shall immediately contact an Agape staff member to request that immediate steps be taken to ensure the safety of the alleged victim. After the safety of the alleged victim has been secured, the person witnessing or with knowledge of the incident of abuse shall complete a written report of the incident of abuse and submit the report to the Children's Director or Pastor.

4. Obligation to report to Law Enforcement

In all cases where any volunteer or staff member has reasonable cause to believe that a child or youth, known to the volunteer or staff member in a professional capacity, has been or may be abused or neglected by either known or unknown persons inside or outside of Agape, the worker shall make a report to the Children's Director and Pastor, and they shall make a report to the local law enforcement agency's child abuse investigators within 24 hours of the determination of reasonable cause. If the Children's Director or Pastor is in doubt regarding whether a report should be made, he or she shall telephone the agency anonymously and discuss the situation with an investigator to determine whether the report should be made. They shall then make a written record of the name and the title of the investigator with whom he or she spoke and the recommendation made by the investigator, then submit a copy of the written record to have on file.

5. Internal Reporting Procedure

The person reporting an incident of abuse shall contact the Children's Director and Pastor. The reporter shall provide information regarding all relevant facts with respect to the incident of abuse. Upon receiving a report of an incident of abuse, the person receiving the report, together with the reporter, shall complete a written report of the incident and submit a copy to be filed in the church office.

6. Responding to the report

When someone receives a report of an incident of abuse, he or she shall immediately take steps to ensure the safety of the alleged victim. After the safety of the alleged victim has been secured, and after the report has been appropriately documented, the person receiving the report shall:

- Contact the parents of guardian of the alleged victim to inform them of the incident.
- Take all reasonable steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer has no contact with the alleged victim pending investigation.
- Take all steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer is barred from further work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults pending investigation.

VOLUNTEER/CHILD PROTECTION

Agape intends to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of volunteers and children. As a precaution and to ensure strict accountability from one adult to another, volunteers must follow these rules:

1. Two Volunteer Policy

Two volunteers should remain together with children at all times. If a volunteer needs to leave a group of children, a second volunteer must take their place so that the two volunteer policy can be upheld.

2. Restroom Policy

Volunteers should provide assistance to a child using the restroom only if the child is three years or younger or has special needs requiring extra assistance. Two volunteers are required to take children to the restroom. One volunteer should hold the door of the restroom open while the child goes into the stall. The other volunteer remains in the restroom to provide assistance as needed.

3. Physical contact

Agape is committed to protecting children in its care and recognizes that appropriate touch is part of a positive, nurturing environment in a healthy children's ministry. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by Agape volunteers.

**** Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant child. A child's preference not to be touched MUST be respected. ****

Using good judgment, the following are appropriate ways to touch kids:

- an arm around the shoulder
- walking hand-in-hand
- carrying a small child piggy-back
- short congratulatory or greeting hugs
- a brief, assuring pat on the back or shoulder
- handshakes, high-fives, and knuckles

The following are actions a volunteer should **NEVER** take:

- never touch a child in anger or disgust
- never touch a child in any manner that may be construed as sexually suggestive
- never touch a child between the navel and the knee
- never touch a child's private parts (with the exception of diaper or bathroom procedures)

Physical contact in any form should be above reproach. The personal behavior of staff members and volunteers must foster trust at all times.

4. Taboo Topics

Certain topics of discussion are best left for parents and their children. If you have a question about the propriety of discussing one of these topics, speak with the teacher or leader in charge of the area in which you serve:

- The rapture
- The tribulation
- Satan – if the purpose is to incite undue fear or confusion
- Hell – if the purpose is to incite undue fear or confusion
- Denominations
- Speaking in tongues
- Human sexuality or reproduction
- Female menstrual cycle
- Drugs, alcohol, or other questionable behavior before salvation

5. Verbal interactions

Verbal interactions between volunteers and children should be positive and uplifting. Agape volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of children.

To this end, volunteers should not talk to children in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children.

6. Visibility and Security

It is important that all interaction between children and volunteers happens in a location where others can observe what is going on for safety and accountability purposes. At no time should a child and volunteer disappear behind a closed door with no visibility to outsiders.

SECTION 3: VOLUNTEER GUIDELINES

VOLUNTEER ATTENDANCE

Agape takes seriously the obligation to its children and asks volunteers to abide by the following guidelines.

1. Arrival

Volunteers must arrive 30 minutes prior to the service at which they are serving or as otherwise instructed by leadership.

2. Departure

Volunteers must remain at the children's ministry event until the last child has been picked up by a parent, taken to their parent, or until relieved by another volunteer.

3. Absences

Volunteers are responsible for their assigned shifts. Should the need arise for a volunteer to be absent it is the volunteers' responsibility to secure a substitute. The volunteer must (1) seek out an approved substitute from the list provided by the Children's Director or leader, (2) contact the Children's Director to inform them of their upcoming absence, replacement status, and the name of their replacement.

In the event of a last-minute illness or emergency, volunteers should call Margo DeYoung or Sarah Hatfield and let them know. PLEASE use this as your last-resort option.

INTOXICANTS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol, tobacco, or any illegal drugs while working with or supervising children at Agape.

CHECK-IN

In order to attend Sunday classes, children (infants through 5th grade) must be checked-in at their appropriate class based on their age. For children infants through 3 years, they must be signed in on the paper roster with a number. This number will match the number on the corresponding tag that the parent takes and is required for pick-up. For children 4 years through 5th grade, they will be signed in on the paper roster before entering the classroom, and assigned either a name button, or a name label. Parent pick-up tags are not required for this age group.

PROMOTION

Agape promotes children to the next class level once each year at the beginning of the school year. Children remain in their class level until the next promotion date unless given specific permission by the Children's Ministry Director.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents are encouraged to visit any and all services and programs in which their child is involved at Agape. 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 Agape will be required to complete the Agape volunteer process.

A parent should be called from the Sanctuary by a Greeter or staff member in the event that the child is completely inconsolable (after at least ten minutes of care), is ill or injured, has a severe disciplinary problem, or is a danger to himself/herself or other children.

DISCIPLINE

Physical discipline, such as spanking, is never permitted. Using physical restraint to prevent a child from doing something disruptive or dangerous is permitted and may, in some instances, be necessary. Affirmation and encouragement is always preferred.

Follow these rules for discipline:

1. Consistency

Discipline must be consistent to be effective. Do not threaten a consequence without the intention to follow through.

2. Response

Make a prompt and individualized response to inappropriate behavior. Correct a behavior the first time and every time.

3. Resolution

Seek to both resolve the conflict and reconcile relationships.

4. Reward

Acknowledge and reward positive behavior. Encourage children who are behaving well and following the rules.

5. Preparation

Read the lesson before you arrive at your classroom on Sunday. Often the best deterrent to discipline problems is a confident, prepared teacher.

6. Prayer

Pray for your kids and your patience consistently. Ask the Lord to guide you throughout the class.

7. Discipline Steps

Children are to be disciplined using time-outs and other non-physical methods of behavior management. In employing this procedure, volunteers should observe the following guidelines:

- a) Verbally redirect the child before physically intervening. With younger children some physical redirection may be necessary (for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child that is hitting another).
- b) If the behavior does not cease, remove or direct the child away from the group to a corner of the room where the group is meeting (avoid being alone with the child).
- c) Provide the child with a simple, understandable reason for the time-out, and provide the child with a clear explanation of your expectations. (“Jamie, you didn’t stop hitting Chris when I asked you to, so you need to sit quietly in the blue chair for three minutes.”) In addition, be verbally reassuring, as being removed from the group will likely upset the child. Do not physically hold the child in time-out.
- d) Follow the rule of thumb that a time-out is ineffective if it lasts longer than one minute for every year of the child’s life (3 years old, 3 minutes).
- e) Monitor the child through the entire time-out without giving your undivided attention. For longer time-outs give intermittent praise to reassure the child and keep them on task. (“Jamie, you’re doing a great job of sitting quietly – just two more minutes.”)
- f) Praise the child once he or she has completed the time-out and tell them that their reward is being able to rejoin the group. Remind them that repeating their initial behavior will result in further time-out. Follow this with praise.

If the behavior continues, volunteers should send a fellow volunteer to go and get their parent.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

Ongoing training is an important, effective, and required step in fulfilling your responsibility as a volunteer.

1. New Volunteer Training

Each new volunteer shall attend one informational meeting regarding his/her area of ministry.

2. Ongoing Training

Volunteers are required to attend any ongoing training sessions as designated by the Coordinator or Director of his/her area of ministry.

3. Periodic Training

From time to time, Agape will provide training sessions to address specific needs and/or topics of interest for volunteers.

SECTION 4: MINISTRY SPECIFIC INFORMATION

KINGDOM KIDS CLASSES

Kingdom Kids includes all Sunday children's classes for children from infants through 5th grade. Classes are designated as follows:

- Little Lambs Nursery (Infants up to 2 years)
 - Little Critters Nursery (2 years up to 4 years)
 - Explorers (4 years – 1st grade)
 - Seekers (2nd grade – 3rd grade)
 - Armor-Bearers (4th grade – 5th grade)
- (Explorers, Seekers, and Armor-Bearers are currently all meeting in the same class, and then splitting up into age groups during group discussions.)

Class ages are based on children's age at the date of promotion.

LITTLE LAMBS & LITTLE CRITTERS

In the Little Lambs and Little Critters Nurseries, volunteers must follow these guidelines:

1. Check-in policy

When parents bring their children, they must write down their child's name and any special instructions on the classroom roster. Volunteers must also give the parent of each child a Security Tag and write down the corresponding number on the classroom roster next to their child's name. Remind the parent that their Security Tag is necessary for pick-up.

2. Age requirement

Volunteers must be at least 11 years of age to volunteer in the Little Lambs or Little Critters Nursery, and must have either completed the Red Cross babysitting course, or completed a training course presented by Agape staff. There must be at least two volunteers 18 or older in order for there to be a teen helper under 18.

3. Diaper procedure

Only adult volunteers 18 or older are to change diapers. Volunteers must adhere to the following procedure when changing diapers:

- Never move away from or turn your back on the changing table while changing a diaper.
- Dispose of diaper, gloves, and wipes in provided trash can.
- Disinfect your hands after changing diapers.
- Disinfect diaper changing area at the end of each diaper change.

4. Bathroom policy

Many children begin potty training during the time they are in the Little Critters Nursery. Parents should encourage their children to go to the restroom prior to class. If a child needs to go to the restroom during class, only an adult volunteer may assist the child as needed using the restroom attached to the classroom. The restroom door should remain open any time a volunteer and child occupy the restroom.

5. Transfer of children

Children should be taken to another program or classroom in an orderly fashion with one volunteer monitoring the front of the line and another monitoring the back of the line. Only children in the Little Critters Nursery may leave the classroom and a sign should be left on the door to let parents know where they are. Children should be counted prior to leaving the classroom as well as upon arrival at the new location. Volunteers should make sure the children are back to their original classroom before service gets over.

6. Check-out policy

A child may not be released unless a parent has the Security Tag which corresponds to the number for that child. The child may only be released to the adult who signed them in – they may NOT be released to siblings or other family members.

7. Room clean-up policy

It is the responsibility of the volunteers to put away all toys and equipment used in the nursery area after each service. Any cups or utensils that were used need to be put into the white wash bin to be cleaned and sanitized. Any teething toys or other toys that children put into their mouths also need to be placed into the white wash tub. The diaper pail trash must be taken out to the garbage can if there are dirty diapers in it. Please make sure to turn off the heat, if applicable and lights before leaving the classroom.

ELEMENTARY AREAS

Elementary classes at Agape consist of Explorers (4 years – 1st grade), Seekers (2nd – 3rd grade), and Armor Bearers (4th – 5th grade).

In the Elementary areas, volunteers must meet these expectations:

1. Check-in policy

Children must stop at the check-in table before entering the classroom, and pick up either their name badge, or a name tag, and have the volunteer at the table write their name down on the paper roster. Parent contact information is not required for elementary age kids.

2. Check out policy

During the last part of the service, the volunteers will line up the children and walk them down to the sanctuary where they may go and quietly sit with their parents until the service gets over. There must be at least two volunteers to go with the children.

3. Bathroom policy

Explorers and Seekers

An adult must accompany a child to the restroom. The adult must check the restroom prior to the child using the facility. While the child is using the facility, the adult must wait outside for the child. Another option is for an adult to take an entire class to the bathroom at the same time. Again, the teacher must check the restroom prior to children using the facilities.

Armor Bearers

Kids in the Armor Bearers group are allowed to use the restroom without being accompanied by an adult.

4. Transfer of kids

Children should be taken to another program or classroom in an orderly fashion with one volunteer monitoring the front of the line, and another monitoring the back of the line. Children should be counted prior to leaving one area as well as upon arrival at the new area.

SECTION 5: SAFETY & SECURITY

SECURITY

Please follow these rules to make sure our children are safe:

1. Unauthorized adults

Only parents, children's ministry volunteers, church staff, and children are allowed in the Children's Ministry areas. All other adults (including any other church members) should be asked to leave the Children's Area. If there are any questions or concerns associated with a stranger in the area, a pastor or elder should be notified immediately to question the stranger.

2. Child custody issue

Due to the nature of child custody laws, volunteers must act diligently in making sure the correct people are picking up their children. Please be aware that only parents with custody of their child may pick up the child. If there are any questions regarding this procedure, please notify the Children's Director or coordinator, or pastor for clarification.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

In case of an emergency, do the following:

1. Medical concerns

Immediately report any medical needs or concerns to the Children's Director, coordinator, or pastor. The notified person will decide if 911 should be called. The volunteer should remain calm and divert the attention of the other children. The victim should be kept quiet and still. Do not attempt to move a severely injured person unless in imminent danger.

2. Hazardous weather

In the event of dangerous weather volunteers should follow the guidelines below. Further instructions will be given by a staff member.

- Stay calm
- Move your class in a quiet and orderly manner to a bathroom or interior hall, or remain in infant area.
- Take your clipboard with the paper roster, and a cell phone.
- Await further instructions.

3. Fire

The first priority in any fire is that all children and volunteers' safety is maintained. Any attempt by volunteers to put out a fire is absolutely forbidden unless judgment to do so is unquestionable and presents no possible danger to anyone present.

Volunteers should follow the directions below in the event of a fire:

- Move the class in a calm manner to the evacuation area, which is the field to the north of the church building. There is a map that highlights your shortest route on the clipboard.
- Take the clipboard, paper roster, and a cell phone.
- Await further instructions.

Parents may stay with you and assist, but they MAY NOT take their child and leave during an evacuation!

4. Missing child

Time is critical if a child is reported missing. Volunteers should contact a staff member as soon as possible with the following information:

- a. Name/age/sex
- b. Color of hair, shirt, and skin
- c. Ministry where child was checked-in (or if they were in the gym)

The person reporting the lost child should remain with the staff member until further direction is given.

5. Media response

In the event of a severe accident or death, it is likely that the media will be on site to cover the incident. It is important that all volunteers not say anything which could be mistaken or misquoted by the interviewer. An Agape pastor or elder shall be the only persons to make any statement. If asked by a media member for a statement, please graciously decline and direct them to an Agape staff member or a member of the board of elders.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND AGREEMENT

I have received and read a copy of Agape Family Fellowship's Children's Ministries Policies and Procedures and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving at Agape.

I understand the manual may be modified, and that any guideline may be amended, revised, or eliminated by my church.

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 Agape. 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 review new guidelines which may be created and distributed.

I acknowledge receipt of the Agape policies and procedures manual.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Children's Ministry Director

Date