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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this handbook is to provide policies and procedures for the Children's Ministry of The Seed Church 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.

Seedlings Ministry Vision

What is it?

The Seedlings ministry is a Sunday morning opportunity for children to:

- 1.) Gain a cursory understanding of Biblical stories, themes, and ideas
- 2.) Begin to grasp the Gospel – the message of God's love for us in Jesus Christ
- 3.) Build relationships with other kids and adults in the church
- 4.) Learn the value of community within the church

What is it *not*?

- The Seedlings ministry is not designed to provide children with a comprehensive understanding of the Bible. It's a short, weekly primer, not everything they need.
- The Seedlings ministry is not an educational program. The volunteers are not professionally trained.
- The Seedlings ministry is not designed to stand alone. It is a supplement to the instruction and discipleship efforts of parents.

Gospel-Centered Focus

The Seedlings ministry uses a curriculum called *The Gospel Story Bible*. This curriculum focuses on teaching kids the stories of Scripture from a Gospel-centered perspective. This means the *primary* focus is not on teaching kids to behave well, or how to be good – the primary focus is on helping them understand that all of Scripture points to Jesus, the only *truly* good person in all of history.

The stories certainly encourage good behavior and right living, but that's not the focus. We don't want kids to grow up believing that their good behavior is what causes God to love them. That's not the truth. We want them to understand that God's love is what motivates us to be good. We don't obey God in order to be loved – we *are* loved, so we can obey God with joy.

We want kids to know, trust, and love Jesus. This will change their lives, and it will produce a heart that desires to honor God and love others. Focusing on good behavior and right living may encourage kids to be good, but it won't do anything to change their hearts. The Seedlings ministry aims at helping kids to begin grasping the Gospel, so that as they grow, they may be established in God's love for them through Christ.

Community-driven

Relationships have great power to transform us. Truth is most effectively taught not through factoids, but through relationships. God created us to be creatures of community. We long for satisfying relationships with others. Healthy relationships in the church are key to our growth in Christ.

The Seedlings ministry is about more than just teaching kids a lesson each week. It's about building community. It's about investing in people, not administering a program. This practically means that volunteers are encouraged to get to know the kids they are serving; to invest in them; to prayerfully serve them with their presence and active involvement.

How can parents help?

We want to encourage a culture of responsibility in the church. If a parent is utilizing the Seedlings ministry for their kids, it is required that they serve on one of the Seedlings ministry teams. Every parent is not called to formally teach, or to lead a lesson. But every parent is called to invest in kids. This ensures that our volunteers don't get burned out, and that we don't create an unhealthy church culture.

We use *The Gospel Story Bible* curriculum because it includes a family devotional book. This helps parents to apply and reinforce at home what their kids learn in the Seedlings ministry. Each week has five 10-minute devotionals. They are pre-written so parents don't need to feel overwhelmed. This helps parents to establish themselves as spiritual leaders in the home.

Our culture thrives on selling convenience. It's easy to fall into a consumeristic mindset. This is toxic in a church. The Seedlings ministry is a supplement to what goes on in the home. We don't want the Seedlings ministry to lower parental involvement – we want it to increase parental involvement. Kids have many more influences than just their parents, but parents are such a powerful influence.

A culture of equipping

In the professional world, people are encouraged to seek out specialists who can do services for them. In the church, God raises us up leaders who are called to *equip* Christians for their own ministry. (Eph. 4:11-12) Every Christian has a personal ministry given to them by God, and every parent is entrusted with the growth and discipleship of their kids.

Kids are humans. They grow up to make their own decisions. As children grow, parents continue to have influence, but they lose control. The Old Testament provides many examples of godly households turning out troubled kids, and also godless households turning out kids who grow to love the Lord with all their heart. God is sovereign. Parents are not.

However, that doesn't mean parents should be passive in how they engage, discipline, and teach their kids. We want the Seedlings ministry to encourage a culture of *equipping*, in which parents care about other parents. Having a really great kids ministry can help to impact our kids, but having a church of healthy families who walk with the Lord as a family is irreplaceable.

Who can volunteer?

The Seedlings ministry is a place for the *whole* church to serve, and it's important that we serve the children in our church family. To learn more about why it's important for us to serve kids, and to learn more about Liz Hadsall, our Seedlings Director, go to www.theseedchurch.org and click 'blog' at the top right. In the search box type 'say hello to the Seedlings Director.'

SECTION 2: VOLUNTEER / CHILD PROTECTION

The Seed Church 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, another volunteer must be notified 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. Same genders should provide this assistance to the children.

3. Physical contact

The Seed Church 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 Seedlings volunteers.

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

- 1.) An arm around the shoulder, 2.) Walking hand-in-hand, 3.) Short congratulatory or greeting hugs, 4.) A brief, assuring pat on the back or shoulder, 5.) Handshakes, high-fives, and knuckles

The following are actions a volunteer should NEVER take:

- 1.) Never touch a child in anger or disgust, 2.) Never touch a child in any manner that may be construed as sexually suggestive, 3.) Never touch a child between the navel and the knee, 4.) 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.

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

4. Verbal interactions

Verbal interactions between volunteers and children should be positive and uplifting. Seedlings 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.

5. Visibility & Security

It is important that all interactions between children and volunteers happen 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

The Seed Church desires to serve its children very well. The following guidelines are designed to accomplish that goal:

1. Volunteer Attendance

Arrival

Volunteers must arrive 20 minutes prior to the event at which they are serving or as otherwise instructed by leadership.

Departure

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

Absences

Volunteers are responsible for their assigned shifts. Should the need arise for a volunteer to be absent, it is the volunteer's responsibility to secure a substitute. The volunteer will need to contact our volunteer coordinator, Evan Reinert, to inform him of their upcoming absence & replacement status. Evan can be reached at (316) 734-5777 or reinertevan@gmail.com.

2. Computer Check-in

In order to attend the Seedlings, children (crawlers through 2nd grade) must be checked-in at the computer kiosk located in the cafeteria. The check-in system will assign the child to the correct age group based on their birth date and print the appropriate security labels. Two labels will be printed – one to be affixed to the child and one for the parent to keep for pick-up.

Parents in the auditorium will be contacted by displaying their child's assigned number in the event that the child is inconsolable (after at least ten minutes of care), is ill or injured, has a disciplinary problem, or is a danger to himself / herself or other children.

3. Discipline Guidelines

Physical discipline, such as spanking, is never permitted. However, using physical restraint to prevent a child from hurting himself / herself or hurting someone else is permitted, and may, in some instances, be necessary. Affirmation and encouragement is *always* preferred.

Follow these rules for discipline:

Consistency: Discipline must be consistent to be effective. The rules apply to all the children.

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

Resolution: Seek to both resolve the conflict and reconcile relationships. Discipline ought to be done in love, and its end is to promote the *good* of the child being disciplined.

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

Preparation & Presence: Be present with the children and prepare yourself in advance to engage them with enthusiasm. Often the best deterrent to discipline problems is a confident, prepared teacher and focused volunteers.

Prayer: Pray for the children in your care, and pray for your patience consistently. Ask Jesus to guide you throughout the morning.

4. Discipline Protocol

Children are to be disciplined using simple verbal reprimands and brief time-outs to help them 'collect themselves.' No physical methods of discipline are to be utilized. Volunteers should follow this protocol:

- a) Verbally redirect the child first. With younger children, immediate physical redirection may be necessary. (For example, removing a toy from the hands of a child who is hitting another.)
- b) If the behavior continues, remove or direct the child away from the group to sit down for a brief time-out. (For example, if a child pushes another child down after receiving a verbal warning the first time, direct the child to sit down for a time-out.)
- 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 this chair for three minutes.") In addition, be verbally reassuring. Do not physically hold the child in time-out.
- d) Time-outs should be reserved for children who are: 1.) Physically assaulting other children or volunteers, 2.) Verbally insulting other children or volunteers, 3.) Intentionally disrupting the lesson / teaching / activity.
- e) Praise the child once he or she has completed the time-out. Remind them that repeating their initial behavior will result in further time-out.
- f) If the behavior still continues, volunteers should contact the team leader or staff member for assistance. The parent(s) will be notified so that they can handle the situation in the way they see fit.

5. Suspicion of Abuse

If a volunteer has good reason to suspect that a child is potentially being abused at home, they *must* report their suspicion to Liz Hadsall, the Seedlings Director.

SECTION 4: SEEDLINGS GROUPS

The Seedlings ministry serves children from 6 months old through 8 years old. The age groupings are as follows:

1. Age Groupings

Crawlers: 6 months old – 1 year old

Tigers: 2 years old – 3 years old

Frogs: 4 years old – 5 years old

Elephants: 6 years old – 8 years old

2. Structure

The Seedlings ministry is not completely age-segregated. During the story time each week, all the children (except the crawlers) listen to the story together. Depending on the teacher, they may also sing together or do an activity together.

After the story time, the children break up into their respective groupings for application time. Teachers help children to apply the story. The children color, play games, and build relationships with each other and the Seedlings workers. The Elephants complete a 'Verse of the Day' activity, in which they find a verse, write it down, and try to memorize it.

On special Sundays, the structure may change as the Seedlings Director sees fit.

SECTION 5: EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

In case of an emergency, do the following:

1. Medical concerns

Immediately report any medical needs or concerns to a team leader or staff member. If Grace Furr or Charlee Cyrus is in the building, their medical expertise should be sought out. The notified person will decide if 911 should be called and use their walkie-talkie to notify the Security leader. The volunteer should remain calm and divert the attention of the other children. If a child appears to be badly injured, do not attempt to move a severely injured person unless in imminent danger. Notify the parents.

NOTE: Every name tag should list allergy information for any child who has allergies to particular foods or other substances they may reasonably encounter in the Seedlings ministry. If a child appears to be having an allergic reaction, notify a team leader or staff member. If Grace Furr or Charlee Cyrus is in the building, their medical expertise should be sought out. Notify the parents.

2. Hazardous weather

In the event of a tornado, the children and volunteers should go into the kitchen. Any room toward the center of the building without windows can be used as shelter.

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.

In the event that the fire alarm goes off, the volunteers should escort the children outside into the parking lot just south of the cafeteria. Parents may stay with you and assist, but they cannot take their child and leave during an evacuation without first notifying a team leader or staff member.