



# Parent Handbook

# OVERVIEW

Grace Hill Kids exists to assist the parents of Grace Hill Church in the spiritual formation of their children. Our goal is to help children become followers of Jesus by...

- ...teaching them the gospel of Jesus Christ – not just Bible stories or moral lessons, but the good news of Jesus.
- ...using methods of instruction and interaction that are both excellent and age-appropriate.

Only the gospel can change people – young and old – at a heart level. As we teach and unpack the gospel for our children, we are participating in God’s mission of redemption and restoration among our families, neighborhoods, and cities for His glory and our joy.

## Why does Grace Hill Church “assist parents in the spiritual formation of their kids?”

Parents should strive to raise children who love and trust Jesus. Part of that includes a careful search for a church that provides resources and opportunities to help their kids grow up in the Lord. Grace Hill Church seeks to be a community that engages our youngest members. But as important as a healthy local church is, parents must not neglect their own responsibilities to shepherd and equip their kids. Children are learning what faith on display looks like in real-time each and every day by observing the words, deeds, and attitudes of their families – especially parents.

According to the Bible, parents have the primary responsibility for teaching their children about God. His word must be prominent in family conversations and shape the daily life with their kids. Training children in godliness is not a task that can be transferred to someone else or put off until kids are older. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, we read:

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

The call to train our children in the gospel is comprehensive. According to Deuteronomy 6, parents have a responsibility to teach their children during mealtime, in the car, before bed, and before the day begins – basically, anytime and anywhere. We call this “living in the ordinary with gospel intentionality.” Even when parents aren’t explicitly talking to their kids about the gospel, they’re always modeling what life looks like when it’s built around the gospel.

There's no more important influence in the life of a child than the influence of the home. Throughout Scripture, it's clear that a child's family has significant sway in the direction of his or her heart. Parents are called to work together within their unique and complementary roles in order to reveal God's holiness, our sinfulness, and Jesus' sufficiency. This means that parents themselves need to live in the reality of their own dependence on God's grace through the work of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Gospel-centered parenting requires gospel-centered parents.

The home is the front line of ministry for children, not Grace Hill Kids or the church at large. Just as Scripture, prayer, and worship are central on Sunday mornings, they should also be a regular part of your time together as a family.

Grace Hill Church recognizes that the church has a responsibility to walk with parents as they train their children in the gospel. We want to equip parents to pray and plan for the spiritual development of their kids, and we hope that our public ministry to children serves to reinforce our parents' ministry at home.

## **What can you do with your kids at home?**

Before suggesting some helpful practices and resources, it's important to note that they exist to serve you and your family – NOT the other way around. While we encourage all of our families to pray together, read together, learn together, talk together, and worship together, our hope is that you wouldn't feel "trapped" by any of the tools or rhythms you put in place. Instead, use them in a way that's life-giving for your family. Anything new might be a difficult adjustment at first, but it should slowly begin to bring you closer to Jesus and one another over time.

### **Teachable Moments**

Throughout the day, plenty of moments present themselves when you can talk about God and the gospel. Creation, sin, grace, redemption, restoration, etc. are all themes that are woven into everyday life.

### **Understanding the Bible**

Read and ask questions about the Bible. Depending on your child's age, the *Jesus Storybook Bible*, or *Gospel Story Bible* will help parents and kids see Jesus as the central theme and centerpiece of Scripture.

### **Grace Hill Kids Follow-up**

Ask your child what they talked about in Grace Hill Kids. Utilize the Elementary class handout if your child is in that class. Open ended questions will help you learn more. Bring the heart of the Grace Hill Kids lesson into your prayers, conversations, and situations throughout the week.

## **Living in Community**

Living life together with others in the church isn't just for adults – it's for children, too. Let them put the gospel to work by giving them opportunities to love, serve, encourage, counsel, solve conflict, and extend grace with others their age.

## **On-the-Spot Prayer**

While praying before meals and bedtime are great rhythms to have, foster an all-day dependence on and desire for God to move in and through your life by praying as things come up.

## **Serving as a Family**

One of the best ways to create opportunities for understanding more about Jesus' work on our behalf is by serving siblings, parents, neighbors, and others in your community. Sacrificing time, energy, and talent together can also bring families closer.

Leaving behind guilt, manipulation, and rule-following, parents should engage their children with grace, truth, and love. Creatively teaching kids about Jesus isn't limited to a formal time of family worship, but for parents to bring the gospel to bear in their kid's life, it must be central to their own.

## **Why is the gospel so important? Can't it wait until my child is older?**

Many children's ministry curriculums use biblical accounts like David and Goliath, Daniel and the lion's den, or Jonah and the giant fish to teach moral lessons. "Be courageous!" "Do what's right even when it's hard!" "Listen to God the first time!" These materials may accurately summarize the facts of the Bible story, but they draw a lesson from the story that the biblical author did not intend.

The tendency is to draw moral lessons ("do this" or "don't do that") that make us the hero of the story rather than making our gracious, faithful, and powerful God the true Hero of every story. We don't believe that the Bible is a collection of moralistic fables about role models who lived long ago. Instead, we believe that the Bible reveals God's unfolding plan to save humanity from sin through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. From cover to cover, the Bible drives us to our need for "good news" – the gospel.

Because the gospel lies at the heart of God's word, we can't possibly help our children grow in godliness by omitting it. In fact, the gospel has to be the main thrust of everything we preach and practice. If it's not, we will teach our children to be rule followers who perform good deeds in order to impress God, others, or themselves. Grace Hill Church wants our children to be motivated by the joy and love that comes from being loved by a gracious God who saves

sinners. Making God the Hero of their story will give them a steady source of comfort, courage, and character that can be poured out for God's glory and others' joy.

Additionally – and perhaps primarily – our children personally need Jesus' saving love (Romans 3:23; 6:23). When we teach children about God's plan to save humanity, it's necessary to explain to them their own need for a Rescuer. We don't want to flatter or deceive our kids by teaching them that Christianity is about making good people even better. Rather, we tenderly teach a child about his or her own sin, Jesus' perfect obedience on our behalf, and the freedom of letting God work through us instead of us trying to work for God. Our goal is to be tender but true.

These are all the reasons why we don't wait to bring the gospel into conversations with our kids. We want our children to personally know how great our God is, and anything less than the gospel will fail to produce the worship we're hoping for.

### **What do we mean by “methods of instruction and interaction that are both effective and age-appropriate?”**

A child's basic attitude towards God, his Word, and his church is formed from the attitudes and actions of the adults in their lives, even during their earliest years. Psalm 78:5-7 states:

*He established a testimony for Jacob and established the law in Israel that he commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.*

We want to deliver the truth of the gospel and God's Word in the best way possible for our kids. That means we've broken up our Grace Hill Kids ministry into separate classes:

#### **Nursery (6 months-24 months)**

Our Nursery is more than a babysitting service. It is the launching pad for nurturing the faith of the next generation. In the nursery, we seek to welcome children with nurture and prayer. In this way, our Nursery forms an integral beginning for our children's ministry.

#### **Toddlers (2-3 years old)**

The curriculum Grace Hill Kids employs for ages 2-3 is designed to teach the Bible's storyline over a 3-year period with 78 lessons from the Old Testament and 78 lessons from the New Testament. The Toddlers schedule is broken down into two main sections:

The children start their time with other classes in a Large Group format. They will be led by our Worship Team in prayer and singing.

Following a snack and outdoor play (weather permitting), the children will gather with their class in a Small Group setting. There is a structured lesson with a specific topic highlighted from the scripture text. Questions are drawn from the stories as told from the Bible or a Bible storybook. The teacher reads the story from the specified book and then asks the children questions about the story. An activity or craft sometimes follows the Bible story. A coloring sheet, which pertains to the lesson subject, is provided. While the children are coloring, the teacher engages the children with more questions about the story.

### **PreK (4-5 years old)**

The curriculum Grace Hill Kids employs for ages 4-5 is designed to teach the Bible's storyline over a 3-year period with 78 lessons from the Old Testament and 78 lessons from the New Testament. The PreK schedule is broken down into two main sections:

The children start their time with other classes in a Large Group format. They will be led by our Worship Team in prayer and singing.

Following a snack and outdoor play (weather permitting), the children will gather with their class in a Small Group setting. There is a structured lesson with a specific topic highlighted from the scripture text. Questions are drawn from the stories as told from the Bible or a Bible storybook. The teacher reads the story from the specified book and then asks the children questions about the story. An activity or craft sometimes follows the Bible story. A coloring sheet, which pertains to the lesson subject, is provided. While the children are coloring, the teacher engages the children with more questions about the story.

### **Elementary (6 years old-6<sup>th</sup> grade)**

The curriculum Grace Hill Kids employs for our Elementary class is the Jesus Storybook Bible. Like the Toddlers and PreK classes, the Elementary schedule is broken down into two main sections:

The children start their time with other classes in a Large Group format. They will be led by our Worship Team in prayer and singing.

Following a snack and outdoor play (weather permitting), the children will gather with their class in a Small Group setting. There is a structured lesson with an accompanying lesson to bring the story to life. Following each bible lesson, children are asked how they say Jesus in the story in order to help them see God's plan of redemption woven throughout the entire Bible. A handout is utilized to further discussion. This handout also serves to provide parents with an overview of the lesson and aid in follow-up discussion outside of Grace Hill Kids.

# Policies and Procedures

## What do you expect of me as a parent? What should I bring?

- Please bring an adequate supply of diapers for all infants and toddlers.
- Please bring only plastic bottles or cups for milk, juice, or water.
- Parents should label all items (such as bottles, cups, diaper bags, wipe containers, clothing, pacifiers, etc.) with their child's first and last name. We provide labels at Check-in, if needed.
- Parents should notify volunteers at Check-in of any allergies or special instructions their child may have.
- Parents are encouraged to keep immunizations up-to-date.

## What do you mean by "a caring and safe environment that fosters relationship skills?"

Ensuring a safe environment is crucial to our mission. As part of our community, we want all parents and children to feel loved and valued by providing appropriate, effective safeguards against preventable and foreseeable harm. This gives our families the freedom to enjoy one another, welcome visitors, and put their attention towards the kingdom.

We observe the following policies for the safety and security of all children and volunteers.

### General Safety and Security Policies

All Grace Hill Kids volunteers must pass a criminal background check. Anyone convicted of child abuse or a related offense may not serve with Grace Hill Kids.

Under no circumstances is a child to be left in a classroom or anywhere unattended. A parent must stay with a child until a teacher arrives.

If you need to check on your child, please be discrete. Going into the classroom may upset your child (he or she may think that it is time to go), and it may upset the other children, as well.

We do not allow parents to assist in the care of the children of Grace Hill Kids unless they

- have met the Grace Hill Kids volunteer requirements, and
- are scheduled to serve on that Sunday (or a need arises for which a Grace Hill Kids Leader requests their assistance).

If for some reason your child needs you at any point during the service, your child's 4-digit security code will be displayed on the screens in the service.

## Secure Check-In Procedure

Grace Hill Kids volunteers will be in the classroom 15 minutes before normal service time. First-time visitors should register their child(ren) at the Check-in desk in order to receive name/security tags and classroom assignments.

Upon check-in, you will receive a security tag that matches the 4-digit alphanumeric code on your child's name tag.

All of the belongings that you bring need to be labeled so volunteers know to which child they belong. Labels will be provided at the check-in desk.

If your child becomes inconsolable and unmanageable during the service, we will notify you by displaying your 4-digit code on the screens in the service. If you see your 4-digit code displayed, please proceed immediately to the Grace Hill Kids classroom where you dropped off your child. A volunteer or Grace Hill Kids leader will meet you to discuss your child's situation.

Please take your child to the restroom before checking him or her in.

## Secure Check-Out Procedure

If your child is in the Nursery, you will be asked to show your security tag to one of your child's room volunteers. They will then match the number on your child's sticker to the number on your tag prior to releasing your child.

If your child is in a Toddlers, PreK, or Elementary classroom, you will be asked to show your security tag when entering the gym, when collecting your child from his/her classroom area, and then a final time when you leave the gym.

*If you happen to misplace your security tag during service, proper identification will be required in order to match you and your child in our system before they are released.*

## Sickness Policy

If your child is sick, please respect others by keeping him or her with you. If your child shows signs of sickness (including, but not limited to, high fever, vomiting, diarrhea, severe coughing, colored nasal drainage, pink eye, head lice, undiagnosed rash, open skin lesions, and any infectious disease), we reserve the right to ask you to remove him or her from the classroom.

Children who appear or become ill while in Grace Hill Kids will be isolated from the other children, and the parent/guardian will be summoned immediately.



Parents are asked to contact one of the Grace Hill Kids leaders if their child contracts a communicable disease (such as chicken pox, head lice, fifth disease, etc.) after attending a Grace Hill Kids gathering.

The medical condition of any child or Grace Hill Kids volunteer will be disclosed only to the extent necessary to minimize the health risk to the person and others. Grace Hill Church elders and Grace Hill Kids leaders will gather the appropriate information concerning any special precaution that may be necessary. Grace Hill Kids will not disclose the health status of any individual without the express written consent and permission of that individual, or in the case of a child, their parent or guardian.

## **Food Policy**

Feeding young children is a serious responsibility. Children should be fed before coming to church. If a baby needs to be fed during the service, the parent must show the matching security tag before their child can be released.

A snack of Puffs or Rice Chex will be served to children in the Nursery. Volunteers will ask parents at drop-off which snack their child is able to eat.

Annie's brand fruit snacks will be served to children 2 years old and up. If any other snack is to be served, an "Allergy Alert" sign will be posted at the check-in desk and classroom door. Please let the classroom volunteer know if your child may not taste these foods or has an allergy.

In order to maintain the safety of all children, we do not allow children to bring outside food into the Kids area.

## **Restroom and Diaper Policy**

Adult volunteers may accompany children to the restroom and stand outside while the child uses the restroom. If children need assistance or supervision while in the restroom, the door will be left slightly open. No adult will ever be alone with a child.

It is the policy of Grace Hill Kids that all diaper changes and toilet assistance will be done by females only.

## **Discipline Policy**

The effective spiritual formation of all of our children is benefited by a stable environment. The role of Grace Hill Kids is to support and supplement parental training by upholding biblical standards for behavior, respect and discipline. Some of the expectations we have for your child include:

- Every child participates with a willing heart, eager to learn and obey. The attitude should be respectful to authority.
- The child is to avoid being disruptive or distracting to the mission and purpose of the children's ministry.
- Disrespect (whether verbally, by gesture, in attitude, or by action) is unacceptable.
- Misbehavior (including, but not limited to, persistent talking, distracting others, not following instructions ignoring instructions or directions, or interacting inappropriately with others in the class) is unacceptable.

For disruptive or unruly children 0-2 years, they will first be issued a warning. If the behavior continues, they will be put in time-out. If the behavior does not stop, we will call the parents and ask them to pick up their child until their behavior changes.

For children 3 years and up, volunteers are trained to give the child a verbal warning. The second warning the child receives will result in time-out away from the other children. The third will result in a parent/guardian being summoned.

Since our goal is to assist you in the effective training and instruction of your child, Grace Hill Kids volunteers will talk with you about any consistent behavioral problems we are experiencing with your child. Sometimes "kids will be kids," and we're okay with that! But Scripture does teach that proper discipline and clear expectations are crucial to raising godly children (Proverbs 22:6).

The main goal for all disciplinary situations is reconciliation. This means that children need to see that they have sinned against God and their neighbor, and subsequently respond to the grace and love shown to them by Jesus in seeking reconciliation with the offended party.

No child at Grace Hill Church will be subject to: corporal punishment (including, but not limited to, rough handling, ear pulling, shaking, slapping, hitting, and spanking); emotional abuse (including, but not limited to, name calling, shaming, threatening, humiliation, or yelling); or the use of physical restraint (unless restraint is necessary to protect others from harm). If any volunteer or staff is guilty of inappropriate action toward a child, he or she may be subject to discipline by the church. Furthermore, he or she may be subject to criminal and/or civil assault charges under the laws of the state of Virginia.

## **Sanitation and Hygiene Policies**

The very nature of childhood can create an environment conducive to spreading infection. Therefore, it is our commitment to try and maintain the safest and cleanest atmosphere possible to ensure the health and welfare of all children.

Strict hand washing with soap and water is of utmost importance in preventing the spread of infection. All volunteers serving in Grace Hill Kids will be instructed on proper hand washing techniques and appropriate times to wash their hands. Hand sanitizer will be provided in the classroom.

## **Suspicion of Abuse or Neglect**

In the case of suspected parental abuse, staff and/or volunteers will report concerns to the Grace Hill Church elders. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person or the staff to substantiate any allegations or suspicions. Rather, we are responsible as a church to comply with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and cooperate fully with the Child Protection Services and the law enforcement officials in our community. At all times in such a process confidentiality will be upheld.

## **Emergency Action Plan**

**First Aid**—Although we strive to maintain the safest environment possible, it is known that the nature of children’s activities occasionally leads to accidents. A fully-equipped first aid kit is accessible in the children’s classrooms.

It is the policy of Grace Hill Kids to first notify the child’s parents in the event of a medical incident. In the event that the parents are not immediately available, childcare workers will administer appropriate treatment measures such as applying pressure or a bandage to a bleeding wound. No pharmacological treatment, oral or topical, will be administered. Life-threatening situations will, of course, be handled as emergencies with appropriate treatment measures being immediately instituted. First-responders and parents will be notified immediately. Grace Hill Church will not be responsible for any “Good Samaritan” assistance offered by any of its members.

**Fires**—In the event of a fire, personnel have been trained to remain calm, count all children in the room and lead the children out of the room in an organized, quick fashion with the assistance of evacuation ropes. The building’s evacuation plan will be used.

**Power Outage**—If a power outage were to occur, children will be entertained and kept secure until their parents arrive.

**Tornadoes, Storms, and Severe Weather**—Children will be calmly assembled along the side wall of the gym or side wall of their classroom until the all-clear is given.

**Earthquakes**—Personnel have been taught to keep children away from heavy hanging objects, tall or heavy furniture, ruptured hot water heaters, gas lines, flammable liquids, and electrical wires. Children will be gathered under a supported doorway or sturdy table and kept calm and secure.

## **Grace Hill Kids Leaders**

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