



Welcome to Parkway Baptist Church!

At Parkway Baptist Church, we take our responsibility to care for children and youth very seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment where youth can grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

The pages of this handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guidelines for volunteers and staff members providing services to youth from 7th through 12th grades at Parkway Baptist Church. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for children and students, protecting students, you, and the mission of Parkway.

After carefully reading these policies, please sign and return the agreement form on the last page. If you have questions, please get in touch with your ministry director.

Thank you for serving, loving, and protecting our students.

Sincerely,

*Parkway Baptist Church  
Staff & Elder Board*

# Parkway Baptist Church Policies & Procedures for Youth Ministries

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# CHURCH STUDENT SAFETY SYSTEM

Because we desire to protect students involved in our ministries, all volunteers and staff must complete the Parkway Baptist Church screening process, including a background check. To serve, all volunteers must be approved by the student ministry staff.

## *STEP ONE: SEXUAL ABUSE AWARENESS TRAINING*

All staff members and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in “grooming” a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, win the child’s trust (and the trust of the child’s parent or ‘gatekeeper’), manipulate the child into sexual activity, and keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

To equip you with the information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behaviors, Parkway Baptist Church requires all staff members and child-serving volunteers to complete Sexual Abuse Awareness Training. This training may be completed live or online and must be renewed every two years.

## *STEP TWO: SCREENING PROCESS*

Staff members and volunteers serving with students are required to complete the Parkway Baptist Church Screening Process, which includes:

- Employment Application (employees only);
- Safety Application
- Face-to-Face Interview
- Reference Checks

A volunteer must be a member of Parkway Baptist Church for six months before being eligible to serve in positions providing ministry services to children.

## *STEP THREE: POLICIES & PROCEDURES*

Please review these policies and sign the last page indicating that you have read and understood the material and agree to comply with our policy requirements.

## *STEP FOUR: CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK*

All staff members and volunteers working with students must undergo a criminal background check. Depending on the ministry’s position, criminal background checks may require different levels or intensity. Individuals who have committed sexually-oriented or sex-related crimes may not serve in any area providing services to children or minors. In addition, certain other past criminal acts *may* preclude an applicant from serving minors.

### *CHILD PROTECTION*

Parkway Baptist Church supports and maintains a **zero-tolerance** child abuse and neglect policy. It violates Mississippi law for any volunteer or staff member to physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect any child participating in Parkway Baptist Church's programs.

### *ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES*

Student ministries maintain the highest standards to protect our church's volunteers and students. Anyone working with children or students at Parkway is subject to the supervision and evaluation of the ministry staff and must follow these guidelines. Staff members and volunteers in supervisory positions must diligently enforce all policies.

Parkway Baptist Church staff reserves the right to dismiss volunteers who fail to follow the policies and guidelines.

### *CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION*

Any person accused of committing any act considered by the church to be harmful to a student will be immediately suspended from participation in ministry to youth. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement, Child Protective agencies, or the church.

Any person found to have violated this policy may be prohibited from *future* participation in all activities and programming involving minors. If the person is an employee, such conduct may result in termination of employment.

Failure to report a policy violation is grounds for the termination of an employee. Volunteers who fail to report a policy violation may be restricted from participating in future activities involving minors at Parkway Baptist Church.

Staff members and volunteer leaders should immediately discuss any inappropriate action or breaking of this policy with their supervisor. They will seek counsel from the church leadership and attorney if needed.

# REPORTING ABUSE OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE

## *REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS*

Parkway Baptist Church is committed to protecting the students in this ministry from abuse. Parkway has a **zero-tolerance** policy that prohibits any act of sexual, emotional, or physical abuse. This zero-tolerance policy requires all Parkway Baptist Church employees and volunteer leaders (those who work directly with students) to immediately report any occurrence (or suspected occurrence) of child abuse to a staff member. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse or neglect will be taken seriously and reported to Child Protective Services or criminal law enforcement by this policy and state law.

Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible that a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to groom a child for sexual abuse. Report 'grooming' behavior, policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to an immediate supervisor, such that the church may take appropriate action to safeguard children in the program.

## *REPORTING ALLEGATIONS OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT*

**We report all suspected or alleged abuse or neglect of children to the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services. Emergency Response Hotline:**

**1-800-222-8000**

Because many adults are unfamiliar with Mississippi reporting requirements and may fear the process, Parkway utilizes a 'tandem or dual report' model, where permitted. A 'dual report' occurs when a Parkway supervisor reports the suspicion or allegation with the individual who saw, heard, or received information causing them to suspect abuse or neglect.

THIS PRACTICE IS NOT REQUIRED OR INTENDED TO INHIBIT ANY STAFF MEMBER OR VOLUNTEER FROM REPORTING TO LAW ENFORCEMENT OR CPS *DIRECTLY*. Instead, it is meant to facilitate reporting, protect children and support individuals who may not feel able or willing to report alone.

*NO PERMISSION IS NEEDED from Parkway Baptist Church before reporting to law enforcement personnel or the Child Abuse Hotline. In addition, a report may be made without involving or informing Parkway personnel.*

While not required by state law, please report all suspicions of child abuse or neglect (or any inappropriate or 'grooming' behaviors of a colleague or coworker) to an immediate supervisor or a Parkway Baptist Church Safety Team member. This request is intended to assist the church in appropriately protecting students involved in Parkway programs.

***When in doubt, report.***

## **BUILDING SAFETY**

Students will always be supervised in a ministry area during regular programming, class, or activity. Every ministry supervisor is responsible for monitoring the ministry program area during student programming. All students should be easily observable during regular programming, class, or activity.

## **SUPERVISION**

Only screened ministry volunteers, church staff members, and students are allowed in areas where ministry to students occurs. All other adults should be asked for identification and immediately escorted out of the area. If questions or concerns arise related to any person in the area, a ministry supervisor or security team member should be notified immediately.

### **Two trained, screened adults should supervise students at all times.**

Avoid being alone with an individual student in any room or during any ministry program. If one supervising adult must leave a group of students, another volunteer or employee must be notified to follow the Two Adult Rule.

If two individuals serving in a room are related to one another, a third unrelated volunteer or staff member must be present.

If an unusual circumstance occurs and you find yourself alone with a single student, move to a room or building occupied by others or to a location readily observed by others. (Example: if a middle school student is the last in a class to be picked up by a parent, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present.)

If you need to talk with a student alone, do it in the hallway or a highly visible area, or have another leader with you. After every ministry event, ensure that every room, space, and restroom is checked before leaving.

Avoid distractions that would impact your ability to effectively supervise students and maintain situational awareness (i.e., use of cell phones and wearing headphones).

## **SECURITY**

After every ministry programming event, ensure every room, area, and restroom is checked before leaving.

## **STAFF MEMBER / VOLUNTEER TO STUDENT RATIO**

Parkway Baptist Church is committed to providing appropriate supervision in all ministry programs. Accordingly, the following worker-to-student **minimum ratios** will be observed:

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| 1 - 10 students,  | at least two staff members or volunteers (2 adult rule) |
| 11 - 29 students, | at least two staff members or volunteers                |
| 30+ students,     | at least three staff members or volunteers              |

Parkway Baptist Church practices the “Two Adult Rule,” which requires a reasonable number of adult leaders (minimum of two) to be maintained when supervising students. A married couple or two family members would only account for “one” in this “Two Adult Rule.”

## **COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES**

Parents are invited to observe all programs and activities involving their students. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with their student’s program must complete the Parkway Baptist Church volunteer application and screening process.

### *Parental Contact*

Parents will be contacted if a student becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in ministry programs.

## **DISCIPLINE**

No physical discipline may be used for behavior management of students, including spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, biting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors.

In the event of a fight or physical altercation, verbally redirect those involved and avoid physical intervention unless necessary for the safety of *other* students. In these instances, staff members and leaders can restrain a student with reasonable physical force, as needed. Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and a Student Ministry Staff Member. Any behavior problems will be handled in the following sequence:

1. The student will be asked to correct the behavior.
2. A staff member will talk with the student to discuss the problem behavior.
3. Parents will be notified of discipline or behavior problems.
4. The student will not be allowed to attend a ministry event.

If a student is unruly or fails to comply with verbal warnings or instructions, that student will be asked to leave (if not endangered by doing so), or the student’s parent will be contacted to pick up the student. Property damage will be reported to parents, who will be responsible for repairs, including damage incurred at off-campus ministry events.

## **BULLYING**

Verbal, physical, or emotional bullying is unacceptable in Parkway Baptist Church’s ministry programs.

At the first sign of bullying in any form, act decisively, and inform your ministry supervisor. There is no “harmless put-down” where bullying is concerned.

1. *First Offense:* Issue a warning to the student and a general reminder to the group that this kind of interaction is inappropriate. Try not to embarrass or chastise.

2. *Second Offense:* Pull the offending student(s) from the group (in a seen or supervised location) and discuss the inappropriate interaction or behavior. Set clear parameters and behavioral goals. Let the student know that the next step is communication with a pastor and the student's parents. Notify an immediate supervisor of ANY signs of bullying or verbal abuse.
  - a. Privately, but with another adult present, confirm that a student who was the target of the bullying behaviors is not in danger of continued harassment and is physically and emotionally stable.  
DO NOT SINGLE A STUDENT OUT IN FRONT OF THE GROUP: be discreet.
  
3. *Third Offense:* Send the student to a pastor for a phone call to their parents and removal from the trip, camp, or event.

## **RESTROOM POLICIES**

Be aware if a student repeatedly leaves to use the restroom and stays there for unusual periods. Report this behavior to a supervisor. In public contexts, send students to use the bathroom in groups of at least three when possible.

## **EMPLOYEE / VOLUNTEER POLICIES**

### *TOBACCO USE*

Abstain from using or possessing tobacco products in church facilities, in the presence of students or their parents, or during ministry activities or programs, whether on campus or away. Parkway Baptist Church is a tobacco-free facility.

### *INTOXICANTS*

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drug while in any church facility, while traveling with students, or working with or supervising minors during any program or activity.

### *NUDITY*

Never be nude in the presence of students in ministry programs. In the event a situation arises that may call for or contemplate the possibility of nudity (i.e., changing clothes during a pool party, weekend, or overnight retreat, etc.), the staff member or volunteer leading the event will submit a plan to the ministry supervisor concerning arrangements for showering or changing clothes.

### *PHYSICAL APPEARANCE*

Please dress in modest, comfortable attire. Please do not wear thin-strapped shirts or low-cut shirts while you are serving. First impressions are essential; please consider this when you are serving.

- No revealing swimsuits
- No revealing/form-fitting clothes
- No shirts with low necklines or that show midriff
- No short dresses, skirts, or shorts



## ONE-TO-ONE INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS

Meeting the emotional or spiritual needs of students may occasionally involve interaction on an individual basis. Please observe the following guidelines when interacting with minors:

The Two Adult Rule should be diligently followed during ministry programs: do not interact *alone* with an individual student in any room or building.

If you find yourself alone with a single student, move to a room or area occupied by others or to a location readily observed by others.

One-to-one meetings with an individual student must occur when others are present and where interactions can be easily observed. *Example:* If a student desires additional conversation after regular programming, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present or into a public space.

If a closed-door meeting must occur, it should happen on church property, with a second adult present. The door must remain unlocked, and any window treatments *open*.

Never hold a one-to-one meeting with a student of the opposite gender.

Any ongoing meetings with students (such as counseling, one-to-one discipleship, etc.) should be discussed with a Student Ministry Staff Member and comply with the Two Adult Rule OR occur in public, easily observed location.

Staff members and adult volunteer leaders may not date (or have *any* romantic interaction with) students in the student ministry.

## SEXUALLY ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in sexually oriented conversations with students. They are not permitted to discuss inappropriate or explicit information about their personal relationships, dating, or sexual activities with any student in the program.

However, from time-to-time student ministry discussions and lessons are expected to address issues related to purity, dating, sex, and human sexuality. These lessons will convey the church's views on these topics to the students.

Students may have questions/struggles in this area and desire to confide in a trusted adult leader for guidance. Proceed with great caution, teach with sensitivity and from a biblical perspective.

- Avoid discussing anything of a sexual nature with students of the opposite gender.
- If a student's questions or comments on a sexual matter become too detailed or explicit in a group setting, the leader should use discretion and schedule another time to meet with this student. For any follow-up meeting: inform a student ministry staff member *first*, comply with the Two Adult Rule, OR meet in public, easily observed location.
- When doubting whether a conversation could be interpreted as a "sexually oriented conversation," treat the conversation as such and follow this policy. When possible, clarify the question/topic with a Student Ministry Staff Member.

## *SEXUALLY ORIENTED MATERIALS*

Sexually oriented materials (images or videos) are prohibited on church property or in the presence of students participating in any ministry program.

## *PHYSICAL INTERACTION / APPROPRIATE DISPLAYS OF AFFECTION*

Appropriate touch is needed and encouraged, but staff and volunteer leaders must keep the lines clear. In light of this, the following guidelines should be observed:

- Physical contact in any form should be above reproach, for the benefit of the student, and never based upon *your* emotional needs.
- Your behavior must foster trust at all times.
- Pat a hand, shoulder, or back in an encouraging manner.
- Side hugs: in public view and kept brief. When hugging someone of the opposite gender, hugs should be limited to side hugs.
- Look for opportunities to give plenty of “high fives” and “fist bumps” unless this makes a student uncomfortable.
- Shake hands or briefly put an arm around the student’s shoulder.

AVOID the following interactions:

- A sexual relationship with a student is never acceptable.
- Never touch a student in sensitive areas (breasts, buttocks, genitals), even if a student has been injured in one of these areas. Never allow casual contact in these areas, under or over the clothing.
- No sitting on laps.
- No hand-holding unless part of a worship/prayer service or a group game.
- Never touch in anger or disgust.
- Never touch in a manner that may be construed as sexually suggestive.
- Avoid touching a student between the navel and the knees.
- Never carry a student piggyback or on your shoulders.
- Never kiss a student or give (or receive) a massage.
- Never place hands beneath a student’s clothing to play, rub, or comfort.
- Never tickle, participate in ‘horse-play,’ or wrestle with a student.

Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant student, except in cases of necessary restraint to protect the child or others.

A student’s preference *not* to be touched must be respected.

Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of others. It is much less likely that touch will be misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.

## *VERBAL INTERACTION*

Verbal interaction with students should be positive and uplifting. All verbal exchanges should be encouraging, constructive, and mindful of our mission of aiding parents in students' spiritual growth and development.

To this end, do not talk to students in a way that is or could be construed as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Do not swear in the presence of students.

In general, verbal interaction should occur in a location where others may observe what is happening. At no time should a student and adult disappear behind a closed door or interact in an area that others cannot see.

## **ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION**

All communication with students must be above reproach and indicative of healthy boundaries. As with any communication, the content of any electronic communication should be readily available to share with the student ministry leader or a parent.

### *TEXTING*

Texting between ministry leaders and students is permissible only, as outlined below. Ministry leaders should send and receive texts using a ministry-provided device/account when possible. Generally, texts should occur in 'group' form whenever possible. Though students often reply individually, try to text in group form and encourage replies to the group.

Prudent judgment must be used in the timing and content of texts. Only text before 7 am or after 10 pm if the texting occurs as part of a programmed ministry activity. Do not share photos and videos of a sexual or suggestive nature. This is prohibited.

Avoid discussion of ANY sexual topic via texts.

Do not post inappropriate or off-color content or comment on inappropriate or off-color posts. When in doubt, treat a post as inappropriate.

**No social media or texting communication may occur with a student of the opposite gender.**

### *COMMUNICATION APPLICATIONS*

It is permissible for the ministry to use applications with messaging features (i.e., Instagram, Facebook Messenger) – a ministry account. At least one other ministry leader must have credentials to access the application and regularly review the messaging, comments, and postings.

It is not permissible for ministry leaders to use personal accounts to direct message students. All group and direct messaging to/from students should be above reproach, available for supervisory access, and originate from a ministry account – not a personal statement.

If a student directly messages a ministry leader's account, the ministry leader will transfer the

thread to the ministry account for a reply, if necessary. All students will be counseled to direct communication to the ministry account.

Avoid discussion of ANY sexual topic via social media.

Do not comment or reply to a student's inappropriate or questionable post. All interactions should be above reproach and reflect the integrity and values of Parkway Baptist Church Student Ministry.

***No individual social media or texting communication may occur with a student of the opposite gender.***

Using Snapchat (or other similar applications) with students is not permitted.

Using Houseparty (or other similar applications) with students is not permitted.

Applications that allow anonymous messaging are not permissible.

#### ***'HOOK-UP' APPLICATIONS***

Though relationship applications are commonplace and acceptable, Ministry leaders are prohibited from participating in Meet & Date or Meet & Chat applications (those applications intended to facilitate sexual encounters).

#### ***PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA***

As a ministry leader, maintain a high moral standard in your social media presence. Inappropriate social media content may be a basis for suspension from participation in student ministry at Parkway Baptist Church. Be cautious about the content of the posts on your social media. Please ensure that photos or videos on social media reflect Parkway Baptist Church ministry guidelines related to alcohol, tobacco, and modesty (dress, posture, and content).

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Staff members and volunteers may, from time to time, be in a position to provide transportation for students. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when ministry workers are involved in the transport of students:

- Students should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops in a non-public place must be avoided.
- Avoid transportation circumstances that leave only *one student* in transport.
- Avoid physical contact with students while in vehicles.
- Absent an emergency, **drivers may not use cell phones** while transporting minors (other than navigation applications for directions). In an emergency, stop the vehicle to use the cell phone unless a stop cannot safely occur. Texting or other cell phone use is strictly prohibited while driving.
- No drivers under age 25 or over 65 may drive Parkway Baptist Church-owned or rented vehicles.
- In transportation, the TWO ADULT RULE or 'RULE OF 3' must be followed.
- Avoid transporting a single student.
- Never be alone in a vehicle with a student of the opposite sex.
- Never instruct a student to drive other students to a ministry event.
- Transport only the number of students for whom you have seatbelts.

- Seatbelts should be worn at all times while in the vehicle.
- No one should be double-buckled.
- Use extra caution when driving students.

## OUT-OF-PROGRAM CONTACT WITH STUDENTS

Parkway Baptist Church's safety standards established to protect students and ensure healthy relationships should also be respected outside ministry programs. In addition to ministry safety standards, the following policies should be respected in all interactions with students *outside* ministry programs.

- Never be alone with a minor in an unobserved context or location.
- Limit connections by gender. Do not initiate or maintain contact with students of the opposite gender.
- Any dating or sexual relationship with a minor is strictly prohibited.
- **Never** spend the night at a student's home or invite a student to spend the night at your home.
- Do not spend the night with any student in an 'away' location (vacation, etc.).

## PLANNING EVENTS FOR GROUPS

When planning a group event outside of regular programming, volunteer leaders should keep parents and staff members informed of details and abide by Parkway Baptist Church policies. Some circumstances may require a release form.

### *OVERNIGHT EVENTS*

Some Student Ministry activities/events require overnight sleeping arrangements for students, staff members, and volunteers (i.e., camp, mission trips, etc.). All programmed overnights must be approved by a ministry supervisor and receive permission from parents. No overnights are allowed on Parkway Baptist Church property unless part of a ministry-sponsored event. No overnight between any church staff member or volunteer and an *unrelated* minor may occur in any context. If pre-existing family relationships exist wherein overnights may occur between 'family friends', these relationships must be communicated to a ministry supervisor.

Student Ministry staff must create a child safety plan for each overnight event to supplement this policy document to provide specific child protection steps unique to the event (activity, travel, location, other groups present).

### *MEDICATION*

Do not administer medication to any student while serving in ministry programs, including 'over-the-counter' drugs. For specific trips or activities (i.e., mission trips, beach/ski retreats), Parkway Baptist Church will bring a medical professional to dispense appropriate medications consistent with other policies and signed parent permission forms.

# POLICIES AND PROCEDURES STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND AGREEMENT

*This page will be signed, detached, and delivered to the Ministry Supervisor.*

Staff members and volunteer leaders must read and understand this student safety policy. Additionally, each staff member and volunteer leader must execute an acknowledgment form that this policy has been read, understood, and will be followed. Staff members and volunteer leaders who fail to adhere to this policy may be asked to resign.

I have received and read a copy of Parkway Baptist Church Student Ministry Policies and Procedures on the date listed below. I understand the importance of the matters set forth herein. I understand and agree to abide by these policies during my service at Parkway Baptist Church. I know that any Policy and Procedure that is alleged or accused that I can be immediately terminated with cause, and my services are no longer rendered or needed at Parkway Baptist Church.

I understand that these policies may be modified or eliminated at any time by Parkway Baptist Church.

While, ideally, I will serve in this ministry for the agreed term, I understand that I may choose to end this relationship at any time. If possible, I will provide two weeks' notice to my supervisor.

I further acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this manual do not express or imply a contractual employment relationship between Parkway Baptist Church and me. If I apply as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no compensation for hours worked.

Finally, I understand that I must review new guidelines created and distributed.

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Staff member or volunteer's name (please print)

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Staff member or volunteer's signature

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Date