

## **River of Grace Child Protection Policy & Security Policy for Assimilating Parolees**

### **Introduction:**

In today's society child abuse accusations occur frequently. This is a sad fact of life. It is also a fact that those who would hurt children will seek affiliation with Christian ministries to gain access to children. We cannot be satisfied until we have done all we can to protect the children from being harmed in any way. We must also do all we can to protect our workers and volunteers from false accusations.

We, in the River of Grace Church ("RoG") Leadership and Children's & Youth Ministries, realize that the child protection policy is necessary, because in these days of social change and shifting moral values, parents entrust their children to us for nurture, safe care and wise leadership. It is imperative that there are guidelines and procedures in place that will provide peace of mind to parents, children and workers.

### **Purpose:**

- 1) to protect children and workers, adults and minors, who attend any church function from the possibility of abuse
- 2) to assist the child who is being abused to find needed help and protect RoG and the volunteers from false accusations

### **Definition:**

Child abuse falls into two categories: touching and non-touching. Such abuse shall include any verbal or sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or infliction of injury. Examples of sexual abuse are, but not limited to, rape, incest, sodomy, lewd or lascivious behavior which includes wrong types of speech or touching.

### **Guidelines:**

Unless specified *the following guidelines are required* for staff, leaders, and workers (paid or volunteer) who share a ministry event with minors.

- a. Complete ministry history and application form.
- b. Complete Confidential Screening Form.
- c. Complete Request for Background Check Authorization.
- d. Conduct criminal background check.
- e. Check references on employment application (paid staff only).
- f. Compete 6 month regular attendance at RoG prior to serving.(To learn more of those interested)

Unless specified *the following guidelines are recommended* for Council members and workers (paid or volunteer) who come in contact with minors.

- a. Conduct personal interview with Pastoral Staff and Ministry Leader.
- b. Review "Protecting Today's Child" presentation *or have* read Child Protection Policy fact sheet.
- c. Check personal and church references from Confidential Screening Form.

### **Criminal Background Check Requirements;**

- Volunteers (14 years old and older)
  - Minimum Requirement
    - National Criminal Database Search
    - National Sex Offender Registry Search
    - Social Security Number Address History Trace
  - If your legal jurisdiction requires more, you must also comply with their requirements.
  - Volunteers must show a government issued ID (e.g., driver's license)
- Staff (14 years old and older)
  - Minimum Requirement
    - National Criminal Database Search
    - National Sex Offender Registry Search
    - SSN Address History Trace
    - State check for all addresses in past five years.

### **Procedural Steps:**

In order to protect the child from abuse and our workers from false accusations, the following steps are recommended:

1. Fill out application form for children's / youth ministry.
2. Workers (paid and volunteer) will be screened by interview prior to work or contact with minors in the RoG Church.
3. Workers (paid or volunteer) will hear or view RoG "Protecting Today's Child" presentation.
4. Workers (paid or volunteer) will read, understand and sign a statement agreeing to follow the policies and procedures concerning child protection and reporting as prescribed.
5. Children should not be left unsupervised while in our care.
6. We prefer two approved workers be present at any church or ministry setting where children are present.
7. Even when ministry to children is not taking place, we prefer an additional adult or minor be present when two workers are together and one worker is a minor, unless the minor's parent has signed a waiver.
8. Supervisory personnel must make random visits of church sponsored activities.
9. Overnight activities sponsored by the church involving minors must be approved by the RoG Council of Elders.
10. All suspicious or inappropriate behavior between a volunteer and a minor will be timely reported to supervisory staff and investigated immediately.

### **Criminal Background Check Screening Rules;**

Standards for Evaluation Background Check Results. The following would prevent a person from working with River of Grace.

- Any crime against children. No exceptions will be granted.
- Any sex crime of any type. No exceptions will be granted.
- Any felony convictions. Exceptions require approval of River of Grace Council of Elders.

### **Re-Screening Requirements:**

- The background check must be rerun for any worker (paid or volunteer) who has not been active within one year.
- Every five years a background check must be rerun and at least one reference must be contacted.

### **Monitoring Compliance:**

- The Ministries Pastor is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Child Protection Policy for all workers (paid or volunteer) at RoG.
- Each year the BAT, in conjunction with the Ministries Pastor, will validate compliance of the Child Protection Policy and submit an annual report to the RoG Council of Elders.

### **Reporting Obligations:**

When anyone employed by or a volunteer in children and youth ministries has reasonable suspicion that a minor is being abused by a volunteer, or is himself accused, or someone whose action would reflect on the church is accused, the following action must be taken:

- **Call the Ministries Pastor as soon as possible and within 24 hours. If unavailable contact the Lead Pastor and/or a member of the Council of Elders.** When uncertain if an suspicious observation needs reported, consider the following criteria:
  - ✓ the child's safety. Does what you observed/heard pose any danger to the child?
  - ✓ the parents' role. Does the situation involve parental involvement?
  - ✓ the church's integrity. Will what you observed/heard dishonor the church?
- Volunteers are responsible for the additional reporting of any reasonable suspicion of minor abuse as required by New Hampshire law. In addition, the River of Grace Church will develop a standard incident report format which will serve as basis for documentation of incident, party(s) involvement, communications and response.
- Any person suspected of child abuse will, upon request, voluntarily relinquish or be removed from duties which involve direct contact with minors until the matter is completely resolved.
- The Pastoral Staff & Council of Elders will give counsel regarding the future ministry of the accused volunteer.

Notwithstanding any statement herein, all RoG workers (paid or volunteer) shall fully abide by all state child abuse reporting requirements.

## **Security Policy for Assimilating Parolees**

### **Introduction:**

In today's world, the reentry of parolees into public settings is resisted. An understandable tension exists between individuals, who have harmed others in the past but claim to want a new beginning in Christ, and Christian ministries, committed to protect workers, volunteers and children from harm. While change in the life of a parolee is possible by the grace of God, the presence of wolves in sheep's clothing is real. This security policy in assimilating parolees into RoG provides guidelines

and procedures for the protection to parents, children and workers, while providing parolees opportunity to prove life change is real.

**Purpose:**

- 1) to provide security policies and practices between RoG and parolees who desire to share in worship, ministry and social events
- 2) to assimilate parolees into RoG through disclosure and mentoring.

**Full Disclosure** Not every parolee wishes to make their past known. For parolees and ex-cons who choose to make full disclosure of past crimes, the following procedure is provided.

1. The Church Leadership (Pastoral Staff, Council of Elders) is informed of the individual's disclosure of past crimes at a regular or special leadership meeting.
2. A Mentor is recruited and assigned by Pastoral Staff. The two-fold objective of the mentor is to provide spiritual nurturing and to ensure the parolee demonstrate integrity towards RoG's security concerns. The mentor will follow a scheduled mentoring plan (Step 3) assuring RoG's safety policy is adhered to. The mentor oversees compliance to defined boundaries and limitations. Quarterly assessments are on-going with written reports to church leadership.
3. The Parole Officer (P/O).  
The Mentor / Church Leader ...
  - a. meets with the Parole Officer (P/O) assigned to the parolee requesting church attendance.
  - b. requests the parolee's restrictions including any temporary release from half way house to a church meeting/event, procedures in how and when to report infractions, etc. The Mentor must learn the parolee's restrictions and boundaries as defined by the P/O.
  - c. prepares a folder to include a copy of restrictions, a record of meetings with P/O and parolee, responsibilities to RoG for the parolee as explained by the P/O, and RoG protection policy.
  - d. provides monthly reports to Pastoral Staff. Quarterly meeting with Pastoral Staff.
4. The church leadership initiates informal introductions with the parolee.
5. Upon completion of a parolee's probation, the Council will review each case individually to establish conditions of continued participation in the life of the church.

**Non Disclosure.** Not every criminal wishes to make their past known. For individuals who make no disclosure of their criminal past, the following procedure will assist in discovering if the possibility of non disclosure concerns exist.

Frequent guests to RoG receive a welcome-follow up meeting expressing appreciation for their attendance. Frequent guests will receive "3" courtesy visits from a Council member with "3" specific objectives.

- a) First meeting – welcome, and INFORMATION about RoG (share RoG's story)
- b) Second meeting – INQUIRE – ask about the visitor's story. Listen for information about home life, relationships, and church life. If multiple churches have been attended inquire of the reason behind the change of church families. Inquire of skills and interests in RoG ministries. Be clear to inform visitor of RoG policy for background checks, etc. and note response. Conduct an on-line background criminal check for sex offender listings.
- c) Third meeting – INVEST – look for opportunities to invest into their spiritual lives, identify possible areas of service at RoG, inquire of any past issues that need disclosed (hurts, injuries, offenses, actions, etc).