

Faithbridge

Safe Ministry Policy



Faithbridge Staff and Server Agreement to keep Faithbridge a Safe Ministry Church

We exercise great care in recruiting and placing staff and servers because we believe that protecting the safety and well-being of the children, students, and adults we minister to is our utmost responsibility. This policy covers how to keep Faithbridge a safe place both for the people you are serving and the people you are serving with. For the protection of all, any staff member or volunteer who serves at Faithbridge must abide by our Safe Ministry Policy.

We especially want parents and guardians to be aware of policies designed to protect the most vulnerable among us. We invite and fully expect everyone involved with our church to notify Faithbridge ministry staff immediately if they see anything contrary to these policies and/or conduct that does not appear to be in the best interest of a child, student, or fellow adult.

I. General Rule of 3 with Minors

1. Staff and Servers will never be alone with a minor (person under 18).
 - A. Always make sure you are not alone with a minor and that you can be seen and heard by another adult unrelated to you or the child.
 - B. When you are speaking to a minor one-on-one, it should be in a public setting where both you and the minor can be seen and heard by others.
 - C. Doors and windows in the rooms must always remain unobstructed.
 - D. If a child needs assistance in a restroom, the door must always remain open, and two females must be present.
 - E. Diapers may only be changed by a female member of the paid staff within full view of the classroom.

II. General Rule of 3 with Married Adults

1. Married staff and servers should be especially careful in interactions with those of the opposite sex.
 - A. While on Faithbridge premises or at a Faithbridge-sponsored event, married staff and servers should not travel or meet off campus alone with an unrelated member of the opposite sex.

- B. When on campus, married staff and servers must either meet in a public space or in a room either with the door open or a window that allows you to be easily seen.
- C. We must take care that we do not unintentionally place married staff and servers in a potentially compromising situation, such as leaving two individuals of the opposite sex as the last remaining people in the room after a meeting.

III. Conduct for Staff and Volunteers

1. While acting in your capacity as a paid or unpaid staff member at Faithbridge, the following rules shall apply both in person and through digital contact and interaction:
 - A. Volunteers and staff will portray a positive role model by maintaining an attitude of respect, loyalty, patience, courtesy, and maturity.
 - B. Volunteers and staff are expected to act and react with Christian love and understanding in all situations.
 - C. Volunteers and staff must treat people of all races, religions, and cultures with respect and consideration.
 - D. Volunteers and staff should never be alone with a minor or a married adult of the opposite sex. (See “Rule of 3” above.)
 - E. No volunteers or staff shall bring firearms onto the Faithbridge campus. Further, no volunteers or staff shall possess a firearm at any Faithbridge-sponsored event.
 - F. Volunteers and staff will dress appropriately. This includes shorts, skirts, and dresses that are fingertip length or longer and shirts with appropriate necklines. Most ministries provide a t-shirt for volunteers and staff to wear. Clothes should be comfortable, appropriate, and modest as you participate. For example, serving with young people usually involves sitting on the floor, playing games, and jumping around. If an event involves swimming or water, modest swimwear will be worn.
 - G. Volunteers and staff shall not be abusive in language or action, including but not limited to:
 - Physical abuse, including, to strike, spank, shake, or slap, etc.
 - Verbal or mental abuse, including, to humiliate, degrade, threaten, or intimidate.
 - Sexual abuse, including inappropriate touching and exposure.
 - Inappropriate Conversations, including topics and words that are not generationally appropriate.
 - Sexually harassing behavior, defined in Section IV.
 - H. Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while serving and/or in the presence of minors is prohibited.

2. Additionally, when serving with minors:
 - A. Volunteers and staff must be free of physical and psychological conditions that could adversely affect a minor's health, including, but not limited to, fever or contagious diseases.
 - B. Volunteers and staff should never leave minors unsupervised.
 - C. Smoking or use of tobacco products in the presence of minors is prohibited.
 - D. Volunteers and staff shall not use or tolerate profanity in the presence of minors.
 - E. Volunteers and staff should never be nude or exposed in the presence of minors or other adults of the opposite sex. This includes situations such as showering or changing during events or mission trips, as well as crass behavior such as, but not limited to, "mooning," etc.
 - F. Volunteers and staff should never expose minors nor endorse the exposure to minors of obscene, pornographic, or illegal material, including, but not limited to, sexually explicit communication, texts, media, etc.
 - G. At no time shall anyone pursue a dating relationship with a minor. Volunteers should be sensitive to minors with "crushes."
 - H. Volunteers and staff will not give one-on-one gifts to minors.
 - I. Volunteers and staff will not engage in physical horseplay, give minors piggy-back rides, massages, or have children sit on their laps. Children pre-school age and younger are allowed to be held for comfort, but the goal should be to get them to sit next to you, rather than on your lap. Side hugs, high fives, and fist bumps are all appropriate!
 - J. Texas state law requires that all citizens report any suspected abuse or neglect of a child or a youth under age 18 to the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services. See Section VII for more details.
3. Any suspicion or awareness of policy violations should be reported immediately to Faithbridge staff, Faithbridge Human Resources, a Lead Team member, or Lay Elders.

IV. Sexual Harassment Policy for Servers

1. Faithbridge will not tolerate harassment of anyone by supervisors, co-workers, pastors, leaders, volunteers, customers, vendors, agents, or other third parties.
2. Sexual harassment is any verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that causes fear, humiliation, annoyance, offense, personal degradation, or creates a hostile environment.

3. Anyone who feels harassed should report directly to a Faithbridge staff member, Faithbridge Human Resources, a member of Lead Team, or a Lay Elder so that any violation of this policy can be corrected promptly. Any harassing conduct, even a single incident, should be addressed under this policy. Faithbridge staff members are further bound by the Sexual Harassment Policy found in the Employee Handbook.
4. Examples of Sexual Harassment include:
 - A. Physical acts of a sexual nature, such as:
 - Touching, pinching, patting, kissing, hugging, grabbing, brushing against another person's body, or poking another person's body.
 - Exhibitionism, molestation, sexual battery, rape, or attempts to commit these assaults.
 - B. Unwanted sexual advances or propositions, such as:
 - Requests for sexual favors accompanied by implied or overt threats concerning the target's job performance evaluation, a promotion, or other job benefits or detriments.
 - Subtle or obvious pressure to engage in sexual activities.
 - C. Sexually oriented gestures, noises, remarks or jokes, or comments about a person's sexuality or sexual experience, which create a hostile serving environment.
 - D. Sexual or discriminatory displays or publications anywhere in the workplace, such as:
 - Displaying pictures, posters, calendars, graffiti, objects, promotional materials, reading materials, or other materials that are sexually demeaning or pornographic.
 - Sexual displays on workplace computers or cell phones and sharing such displays while in the workplace.

V. Social Media & Communication Contact with Minors

1. Volunteers and staff will not reach out to an elementary age child or younger electronically via text, email, social media, sharing photos, video chat, etc. Further, volunteers and staff must agree to:
 - A. Never take children's pictures at Faithbridge or any Faithbridge-sponsored event while serving and/or post them to social media sites without prior staff approval.
 - B. Notify ministry lead if they see or hear of any of these things happening between kids elementary age or younger and volunteers and staff.

2. For the target ministry age of 6th through 12th grade:
 - A. We believe that part of effectively ministering to students involves building relationships and trust with students, so that our staff and volunteers become “safe places” of development and processing for students. We know that the world and lives of students can be challenging, so our desire is to have people surrounding them who will point them back to the truth and life of Jesus.
 - B. This relationship and trust-building happens:
 - During scheduled times of ministry at Faithbridge,
 - Through communications with students in person, via text, email, and approved social media platforms, and
 - Through spending time outside of scheduled ministry time with students.
 - C. Therefore, subject to the guidelines outlined below, we encourage staff and volunteers in direct developmental roles with students to engage with them through text, email, in-person meetings, and approved social media platforms. We see the benefit in students knowing they have layers of people around them – parents, guardians, staff, leaders – who support them and are available to them.
3. General guidelines for communicating with Student Ministry age minors
 - A. Volunteers and staff must be expressly approved by ministry leads to communicate with minors electronically via email, text, social media, sharing photos, video chat, etc.
 - B. Staff and volunteers may interact with students via social media in public avenues. Examples: follow on Instagram, add as a friend on Facebook, and comment on posts/pictures publicly.
 - C. No private/direct messages on social media platforms can be exchanged. This also includes any form of private/direct messages on video games.
 - D. Staff and volunteers may NOT communicate with students via social media using any form of communication that disappears after a given time frame. (Snapchat messages, temporary messages on Instagram, etc.)
 - E. Staff and volunteers may only communicate via social media through accounts where their identity is clearly known.
 - F. Unless specifically approved (see "Exceptions" below), no emails or texts will be exchanged across gender boundaries.
 - G. Staff and volunteers will never delete communications of any kind with students.
 - H. One-on-one video chatting is never permitted. Group video meetings are only allowed under very specific conditions, outlined in “Exceptions” below.

- I. Photos may be exchanged on approved platforms. However, no inappropriate content, including, but not limited to, partial or specific nudity, violence, drug, or alcohol references, etc., may ever be exchanged.
 - J. Staff and volunteers will never make any contact (in person or digitally) between the hours of 10pm and 6am, apart from crisis situations of which a staff member must be informed immediately.
 - K. Staff and volunteers who are contacted by a student in a fashion outside the bounds of the social media policy will respond with the stock "grace statement redirect" (see below).
 - L. Staff and volunteers will never communicate with a student while using or under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
 - M. Any inappropriate material shared with volunteers should be reported to staff leads immediately.
 - N. Any suspicion or awareness of policy violations should be reported immediately to staff leads.
 - O. Student ministry does take pictures and video of students to post and promote events, activities, etc. You may opt out of having your students' pictures posted by request.
4. Guidelines for Approved Staff and Volunteers
- A. All of the General Guidelines above, plus:
 - B. Minors Under 13
 - With parental awareness, we will only engage students under 13 (over elementary age) via email, text, phone, or "GroupMe."
 - If contacted via any other electronic communication means, staff and volunteers will respond with the "Grace Statement Redirect" (see below).
 - Parents/guardians may opt-out by request.
 - C. Minors Over 13
 - In addition to email, text, phone, and "GroupMe," staff and volunteers may publicly interact with students over 13 years of age on approved social platforms (follow on Instagram, add as a friend on Facebook, comment on posts/pictures publicly).
 - If staff or volunteers are contacted through a private/direct message on social media, they are to respond with our stock "Grace Statement Redirect" (see below).
 - Social media interaction will be limited to a select number of approved platforms (see "Approved Social Media Platforms" below).
 - Staff and volunteers who are in direct developmental roles with students will engage in communication with students through approved communication platforms. Parents/guardians may opt-out by request.

5. Exceptions for Certain Roles

- A. If given specific permission from ministry leads, certain staff and volunteers may contact minors of the opposite gender privately through text, phone, or GroupMe, as appropriate for role-specific ministry (e.g., contacted for scheduling on a serve team, etc.).
- B. If ministry is not able to take place in person, student ministry leaders and staff may be given permission to lead their small groups or other ministry over Zoom communication platforms under the following requirements and guidelines:
- Upholding the rule of three (3) still applies. You may video call with multiple students/people present, but NO one-on-one video meetings are ever allowed.
 - There is a chat feature on Zoom, but just like our guidelines for other social media platforms, the use of the direct message feature is prohibited.
 - Considering the safety of both students and leaders, Zoom presents the feature that you must be invited to join a call. Zoom also has a feature that requires passwords and member IDs for calls. Leaders will utilize these functions for the meetings they host to ensure privacy for all parties.
 - Leaders must let their ministry lead know when their meeting is scheduled, so there is accountability with us knowing when meetings take place.
 - For safety, leaders will also record their meeting and send a copy to their ministry lead after their call.
 - The same hours of communication with students are in place. Leaders must communicate with students between the hours of 6am and 10pm.
 - Remember, as you use this platform, our Safe Ministry Policy still applies. That means that you need to still consider your dress code as you are "with" your students. This also means you need to be above reproach with what is on your screen – consider your background and surroundings.
 - You also need to be upholding our existing policies for leader conduct while using Zoom. These policies include not being under the influence of alcohol or any substance when around students, appropriate language, etc.
- C. If communication goes beyond role-specific nature, the staff or volunteer will use the "Grace Statement Redirect" (see below) and connect them with the appropriate person.

6. Approved Social Media Platforms (as of November 2021)

- A. The following list of platforms is exhaustive and subject to change at any time. When in doubt, always ask first. Platforms not listed here should not be used for student engagement by any staff or volunteer in any role.
- Planning Center
 - GroupMe
 - Facebook
 - Instagram
 - Zoom (only under the restrictions explained above)
 - Age-appropriate Video Games (while upholding the "Rule of 3")

7. Grace Statement Redirects

- A. *"Thanks for reaching out. I will reply and continue this conversation via text or email shortly."*
- B. *"Thanks for reaching out. I am not the right person to have this conversation with you; I want to refer you to someone who can continue this conversation."*

VI. Driving/Transporting for Faithbridge-Sponsored Events

1. Before driving for a Faithbridge-sponsored event, volunteers and staff must complete a Motor Vehicle Records Information form (a check of your driving record will be run) and be approved. The motor vehicle check is good for one year.
 - A. Permission to drive will be based on the following:
 - The minimum age is 25 and the maximum is 70.
 - No more than two moving violations in the past three years.
 - No more than one accident recorded in one year.
 - No DWI in the last 7-year period.
2. All drivers require a valid driver's license and current automobile insurance.
3. In addition, when transporting minors in groups, parents are to be informed of the group's travel plans (departure time, anticipated arrival time, and return time). You must have parental permission to drive their child.
4. In an emergency, the volunteer will attempt to call the minor's parent to obtain permission for transportation. When it is not possible to reach a parent, a minor will be transported by two adults.

VII. Faithbridge Events with Minors

1. Overnight Events
 - A. With permission from Faithbridge staff, volunteers can plan overnight events with students. An "event" is any activity associated with a Faithbridge-sponsored ministry or activity involving 3 or more students. In addition to the requirements set forth in the Safe Ministry Policy, any approved overnight event must include:
 - Written parental permission and a medical release for each student participant.
 - The presence of at least two approved adult servants who are unrelated to each other.
 - An agenda for parents distributed at least 48 hours prior to the event that includes location of event, phone numbers of location and leaders, and anticipated departure and return times.
 - A completed over-the-counter or prescription medicine form for any student participant needing one.

- B. Faithbridge reserves the right to include additional requirements for any off-site or overnight event.

2. Offsite (but not overnight) Events

- A. With permission from Faithbridge staff, volunteers can plan single-day offsite events with students that do not involve an overnight stay. An "event" is any activity associated with a Faithbridge-sponsored ministry or activity involving 3 or more students. In addition to the requirements set forth in the Safe Ministry Policy, any approved offsite event must include:

- Written parental permission and a medical release for each student participant.
- The presence of at least one approved adult servant.
- An agenda for parents distributed at least 48 hours prior to the event that includes location of event, phone numbers of location and leaders, and anticipated departure and return times.
- A completed over-the-counter or prescription medicine form for any student participant needing one.

- B. Faithbridge reserves the right to include additional requirements for any off-site or overnight event.

VIII. Duty to Report Suspected Harm, Abuse or Neglect

1. Oftentimes in ministry, people will elect to share personal information, struggles, and circumstances that require swift ministerial follow-up. Sometimes legal and parental follow-up are also required. Faithbridge staff members are responsible for assessing each situation and deciding appropriate follow-up and reporting steps. Volunteer shall report all information shared to lead staff when you have:
 - A. Suspicion of harm to self or others, or
 - B. Suspicion of harm to a minor (self-harm or inflicted).
2. "Harm to self" can include situations such as, "The minor has reported the use of illegal drugs," "I suspect the minor may be self-harming by cutting arms when stressed," or "This person in my small group confided in me a desire to end their own life."
3. "Harm to others" could include situations such as, "The minor reported drinking alcohol and driving others home," "The minor made threats against others," or "I have suspicion of spousal abuse with someone in my ministry."

4. Additionally, Texas law requires every adult to report the following to the appropriate authorities:
 - Child abuse and neglect.
 - Abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and exploitation of the elderly or adults with disabilities living at home.
 - Abuse of children in child-care facilities or treatment centers.
 - Abuse of adults and children who live in state facilities or are being helped by programs for people with mental illness or intellectual disabilities.
5. This mandatory reporting applies to all individuals. The law even extends to individuals whose personal communications may be otherwise privileged, such as attorneys, clergy members, and health care professionals.
6. All persons are required to make the report immediately, and individuals who are licensed or certified by the state or who work for an agency or facility licensed or certified by the state and have contact with children as a result of their normal duties, such as teachers, nurses, doctors, and daycare employees, must report the abuse or neglect within 48 hours.
7. Texas law broadly defines "abuse" and "neglect" so that every action in which someone's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected is potentially covered. A person acting in good faith who reports or assists in the investigation of a report of child abuse or neglect is immune from civil or criminal liability.
8. Additionally, Texas law prohibits sexual contact outside the bounds of marriage between a person and their minister, clergy, spiritual advisor, counselor, therapist, or other person of authority who can exploit the emotional dependency of that person.
9. Any reporting must be brought to the attention of Faithbridge staff. We ask volunteers and staff to submit to and trust our leadership as we walk through situations together. When it comes to legally required reporting of suspected abuse or neglect, it is not the job of the volunteer or employee to decide guilt or innocence; it is simply our job to report.
10. Faithbridge staff members who fail to report suspected abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by law within 48 hours are subject to discipline up to and including termination.

IX. Reporting Violations of this Policy

1. Any volunteer or employee who learns of, observes, or has reason to be concerned about violations of this policy must immediately inform a Faithbridge ministry staff member, a member of Lead Team, Faithbridge Human Resources, or a Lay Elder. Reports do not need to be made in writing.

2. Employees and volunteers who believe that they themselves or any other individual has been subjected to violations of this policy, whether by a church member, volunteer, leader, employee, or a third party, must promptly report the facts and names of the individuals involved to a Faithbridge staff member, a member of Lead Team, Faithbridge Human Resources, or a Lay Elder.
3. All Faithbridge staff members who receive a report or information about suspected violations of this policy, observe what may be violations of this policy, or suspect that violations of this policy are occurring, are required to report such suspected violations to Faithbridge Human Resources.
4. In addition to being subject to discipline if they engaged in violating this policy themselves, supervisors and managers will be subject to discipline up to and including termination for failing to report suspected violations or otherwise knowingly allowing violations to continue.

X. Safe Ministry Policy Investigation

1. Faithbridge takes reports of violations of this policy very seriously. As a result, all reports of policy violations will be thoroughly and promptly investigated.
2. During such investigation, Faithbridge will take appropriate measures to maintain the confidentiality of the participants to the extent possible. Although it may be necessary to divulge some information to ensure that a fair investigation is conducted, Faithbridge will limit information to only those persons with a need to know of the complaint or of the investigation.
3. If an investigator concludes that conduct in violation of this policy has occurred, the offending individual(s) will be subject to corrective action, including formal discipline, up to and including termination of employment. Faithbridge will discipline any individual who violates this policy even if such conduct does not rise to the level of a violation of the law.

XI. Reporting and “Name Clearing” for Employees and Volunteers

1. Because of the nature of church ministry, with high levels of implied trust and greater potential to have access to vulnerable people, churches are at a higher risk of predatory behavior. In our due diligence to protect the safety of all Faithbridgers, employees and volunteers are required to report or “Name Clear” individuals who they suspect or know do not conform to our Safe Ministry protocol and/or Faithbridge Safe Ministry Policy and have access to Faithbridge members and attenders of any age. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - A. Someone who is a registered sex offender.
 - B. An individual with assault charges.

- C. Someone who shows the signs of a high-risk individual outlined in the Ministry Safe training, including but not limited to:
 - History of violence or abuse, physical, verbal or otherwise.
 - History of threatening violence or abuse.
 - History or has shown signs or willingness for self-harm and suicidal tendencies.
 - History or tendency to harm animals.
 - Frequently talking, making, or sharing social media posts about hatred, disgust, or violence against others.
 - Providing inaccurate or incomplete information on an application to serve.
 - Pattern of volunteer or work history around a particular age or sex of child.
 - Applicant regularly gaining access to children of a specific age and sex.
2. Examples of having access to Faithbridge members and attenders of any age can include, but is not limited to:
 - A. Physical access, including, but not limited to:
 - On-campus ministry.
 - In-home ministry (e.g., small groups).
 - Transportation and travel.
 - B. Access through relationships, including, but not limited to:
 - The spouse, household member, or loved one of an employee or volunteer.
 - Someone who has authority over an employee or volunteer, including an employer, leader, pastor, etc.
 - C. Anyone who has access to communication devices of an employee or volunteer, including, but not limited to:
 - Anyone who has access to the devices, approved or not, detailed in Section III above.
 - Anyone who has access to devices, including phones, computers, and tablets used to access the church database and other sensitive record data.

Safe Ministry Policy Agreement

Required for all Faithbridge staff and leaders, and all volunteers serving with minors.

I, (print name) _____, certify that I have read and agree to comply with the Faithbridge Safe Ministry Policy, stated above.

Full Name (printed): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____