



THE RIVER
KIDS' COMMUNITY

FAMILY & VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

*Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them,
for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."*

- Matthew 19:14

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WELCOME

Welcome to Children's Ministry at The River!

We are glad that you are part of our community or exploring it. Children's ministry exists to support children and families in their journey of faith and discipleship. ***Our vision is that children will experience the love of God and God's family, grow deep and genuine roots of faith, and begin to manifest God's kingdom in their lives and in the world.***

We believe children are an essential part of the church community, and are fully capable of real spirituality. They can know, love, and speak to God as God knows, loves, and speaks to them. Children bring their own thoughts, emotions, and experiences to their faith, and are able to explore the truths of God at their own pace and in God's timing.

We want children to develop the building blocks of faith - things that everyone needs to grow!

- To **belong** to God and in God's family, the church.
- To **know and understand** who God is, how God's salvation story is unfolding over time, and what their own part is in that story.
- To **have hope** and confidence, through Christ, in all of God's promises; that God is making all things new, including them.
- To be **called & equipped** to use our gifts and talents in the service of God and our neighbor.

Our job as adults is to model faith, introduce them to the stories of God and God's family, help them notice and name God's work in their lives, and give them opportunities for discipleship. We remember that children, youth, and adults can all learn from each other. We acknowledge that parents are the primary spiritual influence for kids, and a life of faith is "caught" more than "taught." We recognize that children's faith will best be able to grow within an environment that is safe, both physically and emotionally, and we aim to provide that.

At The River, we support children and families by ...

- Hosting Kids' Community on Sunday mornings (a playful time of stories, response, and relationships)
- Partnering with and equipping parents (groups, resources, etc.)
- Celebrating milestones (such as child dedications, first Bibles, graduations)
- Creating special events and outreach (holidays, camps, etc.)

Please contact us if you have any questions or would just like to further explore how we can partner with your family!

Deborah Woo-Miller, *Interim Children's Ministry Director*

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SUNDAY MORNING COMMUNITIES

The following communities are available depending on typical attendance at a service time and volunteer availability. When enrollment is low we may combine classes. Children are always welcome in the sanctuary, and there is dedicated seating for families with young ones.

Purple Room: for infants 6 weeks to 18 months (9 a.m. only)

A compassionately nurturing introduction to church that extends parents' love, protection, and care. The room is well equipped with age-appropriate toys and comforting adult volunteers. Ratio is 1 adult to 2 infants (up to 6).

Yellow Room: for toddlers & preschoolers, 18 months to 4 years (9 & 11 a.m.)

A loving, safe place where children are free to develop their personalities and grow in their understanding of God with age-appropriate guidance. Each Sunday there is story time, music, and lots of time for free play (and sometimes a visit to the playground!). Ratio is 1 adult to 4 children (up to 16).

***Green Room: for PreK, Kinder & 1st graders (11 a.m. only, combined with Blue at 9 a.m.)**

Children are invited into the unfolding story of God and God's people through an approach called Godly Play, a Montessori-based curriculum that teaches kids with hands-on material, open-ended discussion, and a child-directed time of response. There are also opportunities for children to get to know one another, serve each other, and pray together. 2 adults lead up to 16 children.

***Blue Room: for 2nd & 3rd graders (Combo class at 9 a.m., separate at 11 a.m.)**

This class continues to use Godly Play, a Montessori-based curriculum that teaches kids with hands-on material, open-ended discussion, and a child-directed time of response. As the children get older, they will build on the "core" stories they know by exploring "extension" lessons that give them a deeper, broader, and more integrative look at the story of God and God's people. There are also opportunities for children to get to know one another, serve each other, and pray together. 2 adults lead up to 16 children.

***Red Room: for 4th-5th graders (11 a.m. only)**

In this community, children begin the transition to pre-adolescence and youth ministry by exploring the "big God story" of the Bible through creative storytelling, media, and hands-on activities. Emphasis is placed on discussion, personal response, and application to real-life challenges of this age group. Children are given opportunities for service and prayer as a group. 2 adults lead up to 24 children.

**Kids in these communities are signed-in to their classrooms and then accompany their parents to the sanctuary for start of service. After the welcome, they are dismissed to meet one of their volunteer teachers at the side of the sanctuary.*

The River Church Community also has occasional **All Church Services**, when children join their parents/guardians and the rest of the congregation for the morning.

VOLUNTEERS

"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." - Mark 9:37

Qualifications: Every volunteer and staff person who works with children shall:

- Confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior
- Adhere to the affirmations of faith of the church
- Either be a partner in good standing or a regular attendee for at least six months
- Have no history of being an abuser

Application process:

- Observe a Kids' Community class if unfamiliar with our program
- Have a conversation with Children's Ministry staff about program and roles
- Complete confidential application, including disclosures and references
- Read the full Kids' Community Handbook and complete quiz (annually)
- Take Sexual Abuse Awareness training (required every 2 years)
- Complete fingerprinting (forward-monitoring)
- Staff will check references

Training process:

1. Observe the Kids' Community classroom in which you intend to serve.
2. On at least one Sunday, serve as "apprentice" along with a staff member or experienced volunteer who can explain the role.
3. Volunteers will begin serving alongside a more experienced volunteer who can provide coaching and feedback. Volunteers are expected to spend a few minutes talking with each other after class about what went well and what could use improvement.
4. Children's Ministry staff will provide training opportunities throughout the year and volunteers should feel free to reach out to staff with questions.

Youth volunteers

- We welcome middle school and high school students to join us as volunteers! They go through an application process along with reference checks, and will receive training and coaching as they serve alongside adult volunteers. In order to provide adequate training and supervision, we typically do not schedule more than 1-2 youth volunteers to serve at the same time.

Paid childcare

We occasionally hire paid childcare workers for special events or meetings. Childcare workers are background checked and/or fingerprinted and serve on the payroll of The River. They follow the same safety and security policies as outlined in this document. When the number of children is small, parents can elect to have only one childcare worker who serves as a babysitter.

CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES

The River's Safety Commitments

The River Church has three community-wide safety commitments that apply for all church-related programs and activities. These are practical ways of honoring health boundaries, and to help each of us share Christlike love for others. For all details, please see the-river.org/safety.

1. Touch must be welcomed and accountable
2. Communication must be respectful
3. Isolation with kids and youth is not okay

Children's Ministries has specific policies in place that help us to meet those commitments.

Supervision

Volunteers should never be alone with children. We have a 2-adult policy: We always require a minimum of two approved adults with the children. A parent may not drop off his or her child if there is only one adult present. They must stay and wait until there are at least two screened adults. At no time should one adult be with one child, other than a parent with their own child.

We do our best to schedule a mix of female and male volunteers whenever possible. It is our practice not to schedule a married couple together as the only two adults in the room.

During every church service we have a staff member or trained volunteer who serves as a "roamer" in the KC hallway. They keep an eye on the hallway and also look in classroom windows. The only adults permitted in the hallway on Sunday mornings are parents and volunteers. When kids go to the bathroom with a buddy, the roamer is present in the hallway. There are also surveillance cameras on each end of the KC hallway.

Bathroom use

Before and after service, parents should accompany a child to the bathroom, or have a child go with a buddy. If a child needs to use the restroom while in a KC class, we follow this procedure:

- **Toddler/Preschool bathroom:** A dedicated bathroom is connected to and shared between the Yellow and Orange rooms. A child may choose to use the bathroom independently with the door propped slightly open in case they need help. Or, if the child needs assistance, the door should remain propped fully open while a screened adult helps them in view of another adult in the room.
- **Hallway bathroom:** For kids who can use the restroom independently (Green, Blue, and Red Room), there is also a single-occupancy bathroom in the KC hallway. NO ADULTS may use this bathroom on Sunday mornings (adult restrooms can be found in the shared lobby between The River and CEFCU). Children in Blue & Green will walk to the hallway bathroom with another child as a "buddy," but only one child may be in the bathroom at a time. The "buddy" waits in the KC hallway in view of the roamer and the hallway cameras. Children in the Red Room may use the bathroom on their own with a bathroom pass.

Physical touch

Touching is a complex topic; touch can be very positive and it's important for children to understand and receive positive touch. Context and situation must always be taken into consideration. It is quite

appropriate for a volunteer to hold and comfort an infant or toddler. In the same way, it can be appropriate to hug children or youth who are grieving or hurt when a child initiates the hug. All leaders should ASK children for permission before touching them and respect the child's right if they say "no."

It may be best to consider the types of touch that are okay to initiate and not okay to initiate. Below are some examples of both:

- Appropriate touch in proper context (with child's permission):
 - Celebrating: high fives, handshakes, side hugs
 - Prayer/blessing: holding hands, hands on shoulders
 - Comfort and redirection: a hand on the shoulder, side hugs
 - Holding an infant/toddler, infant/toddler sitting on laps
 - Attending to a minor injury
- Inappropriate touch:
 - Wrestling, tickling, caressing
 - School-aged children sitting on laps
 - Grabbing, slapping, hitting, spanking
 - Lying down with children or letting children lie down on you
 - Any touching of a sexual nature ("bathing suit area")
 - Touching them if they do not want to be touched

Please note that in a family situation, things like wrestling and tickling can be just fine, but in ministry settings it's not appropriate, even between family members.

OTHER CLASSROOM PROTOCOLS

Check in and out

Parents use the ipad kiosks to check in their kids. It will print a name tag for each child, a roster label for each child, and one security tag per family. Children in the Purple and Yellow Rooms are dropped off at the beginning of service. Children in the Green Room, Blue Room, and Red Room accompany their parents to service after being signed in, and then will be dismissed to a volunteer who will lead the children to the classroom.

At the end of service, parents will go to the child's classroom to pick them up. Parents will show the security tag and the volunteer at the door will match the security code to the child's name-tag. A parent may also show a photo of the security tag. Security codes are randomly generated and change every time. If a parent does not have the security tag or a photo of it, they may show a photo ID that corresponds with the parent name printed on the child's name-tag. If a child is not picked up from class right away, the roamer will contact the parent listed on the child's name tag.

Full classrooms

We maintain child/adult ratios and maximum class numbers that we feel are the safest for the children. In the instance when a community is full, parents can consider the following options:

1. Children are welcome in the service. Should a child become too disruptive, please note that there is a speaker in the lobby where parents can still hear the service.

2. If there is physical space but not enough volunteers, parents can help in the class that Sunday and get to know other children and adults for the morning.

Parents should not put children in communities that are not appropriate for their age. We apologize in advance for any inconvenience.

Food & drink

We provide a light snack (nut-free) and water in all of the communities. If a child has an allergy to that day's snack, please inform the volunteer in your child's room, so we can provide an alternative snack. If the child has a severe and life-threatening allergy, please speak with the Kids' Community staff to determine a plan of action.

No outside food or drink is allowed in Kids' Community rooms. Children finishing outside food should wait by the door. Infants or toddlers may bring a sippy cup that is clearly labeled and given to one of the volunteers to be kept in a place where other children cannot reach it. The child can ask for a drink and will be given their cup to use at snack time. Volunteers are not expected to prepare bottles; if an infant needs to be fed, a parent is welcome to bottle- or breast-feed them in the infant room or in service.

Contacting parents during service

If the parent of an infant or toddler needs to be reached during service, the volunteer and/or roamer will text or call the number listed on the child's roster label. Parents should make sure that this number matches the adult present at church and that the phone is accessible.

Classroom management

Volunteers will make sure children are engaging in safe and appropriate behavior. All active play should be friendly and controlled. Volunteers will use positive reinforcement, role modeling, and appropriate communication as they work with the group of children. If a child is having a hard time following classroom expectations, volunteers will redirect them, speak with the child individually, and/or help them take a break from the stimuli. Volunteers will use kind and respectful language with the children, never mean or shaming.

ONLINE POLICIES

These policies apply when a group including children is meeting via Zoom or other video conferencing service.

- **Waiting room:** The online meeting will be set with a waiting room. Participants must use their real names to log on.
- **Two-adult rule:** Online sessions will always have two verified adults present. Children will not be let in from the waiting room until both adults are ready. Both adults will need to stay on until all children have left the meeting (or until the meeting is ended by the host).
- **Recording:** For the sake of privacy, we will not record online sessions that include children unless there is explicit parent permission.

HEALTH POLICY

Covid and infectious diseases

The health of children and all members of our community is very important to us, and we want to “love our neighbors” well by taking appropriate precautions to avoid spreading illness.

These precautions *may* include things like requiring masks, asking volunteers to inform us of their vaccination status, having high-quality air filters running during programs, limiting capacity in rooms, not serving snack, and/or offering rapid tests to volunteers if there is a concern.

We continually evaluate our practices in light of government regulations and the advice of medical professionals. As these guidelines change, we will communicate to families and volunteers any adjustment to the programs, policies, or guidelines in this handbook. Please feel free to direct any questions to kids@the-river.org.

Sick children

Providing a safe and healthy environment for the children is a community commitment and effort.

Parents should not check a child into Kids’ Community if he or she has any of the following symptoms:

- Fever of over 99.6 degrees
- Vomiting or diarrhea within the last 24 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Sore throat or trouble swallowing
- Coughing and/or sneezing (not caused by allergy)
- Skin infections (including unexplained rashes, sores or spots)
- Unusually red, watery, or itchy eyes; eyes with discharge
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease such as persistent headache, lethargy, nausea, chills, generalized muscle aches and pains

If a KC volunteer notices symptoms of illness, they will contact the child’s family to pick them up. If there is any doubt, please keep a child out for the day.

Please notify the Children’s Ministry Director immediately with any questions or concerns related to health issues. **It is also crucial for parents to notify the director if a child becomes very ill in the days following Kids’ Community with a more serious infection or virus, or has a positive Covid test.** We will confidentially notify the other families of children who attended the same class/service.

Medication

It is the policy of The River Church Community not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medication to children under our care. Exceptions to this policy may be granted for children with potentially life-threatening conditions (e.g., asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the children’s ministry director/pastor to determine a plan of action.

Accidental injuries

In the event a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

- For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, supervising adults (volunteers or childcare workers) will provide first aid as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up.
- For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, the supervising adult (volunteer or childcare worker) should immediately tell the roamer/supervisor and also contact the parent and/or guardian. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
- Once a child has received appropriate medical attention, the supervising adult should complete an "Ouch Report" Form and give it to the roamer/supervisor.

EMERGENCIES

In case of **MEDICAL EMERGENCY**, volunteers will:

- **Call 911**
- **Notify medical help:** one adult (usually roamer) should run to the tech booth in the sanctuary and ask for the number "119" to be posted. (This will alert doctors/nurses who are part of our community to exit the sanctuary). Wait for response & escort medical help to the child in need.
- **Notify parents**

In case of **FIRE**, volunteers will:

- Get **1) red emergency backpack, 2) class roster, 3) your cell phone.**
- Gather all the children at the main door of your classroom. Check to see if you are in immediate danger of the fire. If you are, stay in the classroom and call the roamer; if not, assign a helper to ensure that all the children are accounted for.
- Follow the evacuation map for primary and secondary routes. Use a rope to keep the children in line. Once you have arrived at the designated meeting point, check that the children on the roster are present. Hold up the laminated room sign so parents can find you. Check out children by matching the security code.

In case of **EARTHQUAKE**, volunteers will:

- Drop to your knees and crawl under a table. Direct children to follow your example. If there is not enough space under a table, use a chair. Ensure that everyone has at least their heads & necks protected.
- As soon as the shaking stops, follow fire procedures.
- **DO NOT CALL 911 UNLESS THERE IS A FIRE OR MEDICAL EMERGENCY.**

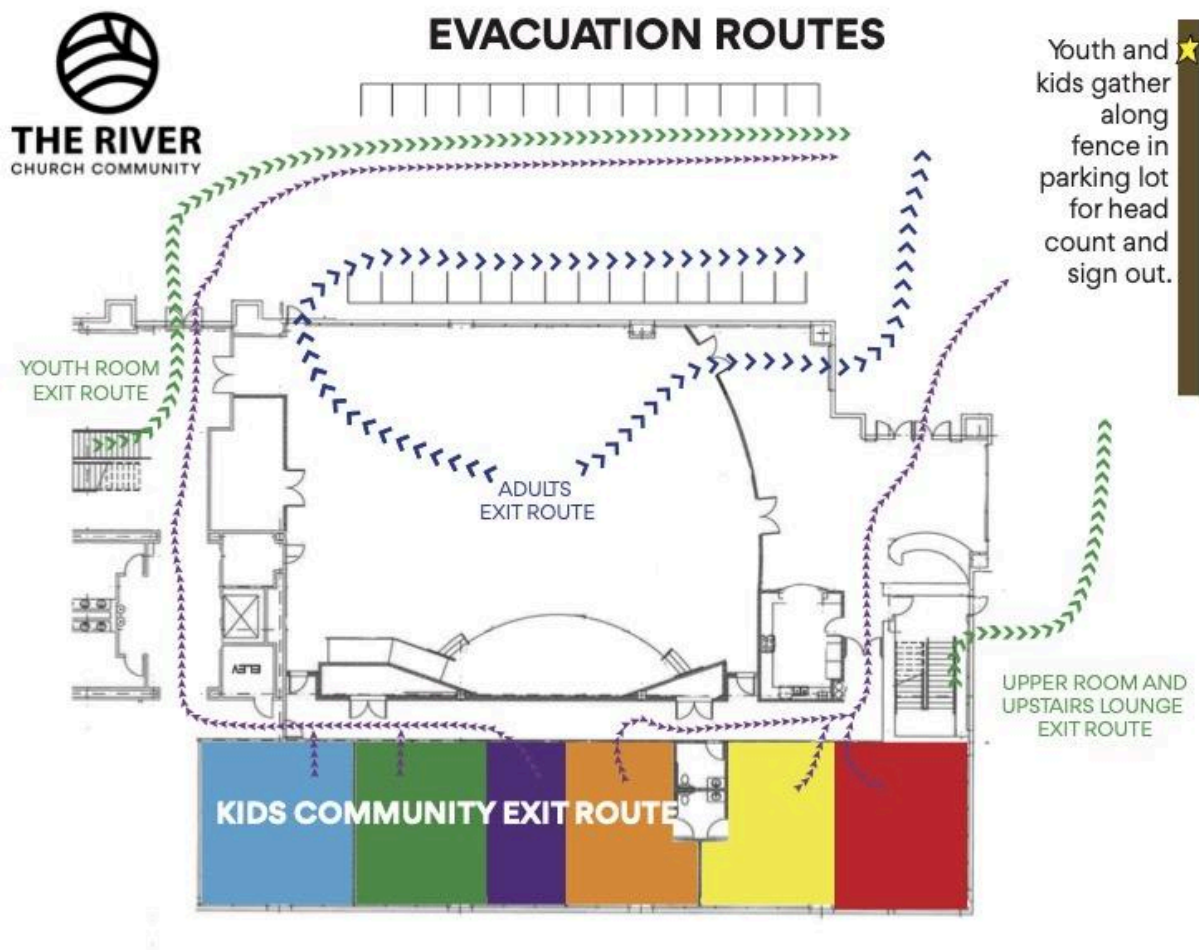
In case of **VIOLENT THREAT**, volunteers will:

- Lock & barricade doors. Cover door window. Hide children out of sight, asking them to remain silent. Remain hidden until law enforcement has confirmed the threat is over.

Emergency evacuation

In the event of an emergency evacuation, parents should NOT go to their child. The children will be evacuated at the safest time possible with their class. They will go to the fence line on the north side of the parking lot away from the building (to the right if you were exiting from the lobby). Adults will exit

according to evacuation routes, then find their child's class (look for color-coded room sign). Teachers will match the security code when checking out children.



REPORTING & RESPONSE PROCEDURES

Reporting Obligations: Volunteers or staff are to immediately report any behavior, which seems abusive or inappropriate, or any incident reported by a child or adolescent.

Line of Reporting:

1. Volunteers or parents shall report the incident directly to Kids' Community staff or senior leadership. They may also report an incident directly to The River Safeguarding Team and/or authorities (see #4).
2. Kids' Community staff shall report the incident to the Safeguarding Team (safety@the-river.org).
3. If the allegation is directed toward a staff member, reporting may be made to the board chair (boardchair@the-river.org) in addition to the Safeguarding Team (safety@the-river.org).

4. As mandated reporters, staff must report suspected child abuse or neglect to the police or Department of Family & Children's Services at once or as soon as possible. The Santa Clara County Child Abuse & Neglect Center (CANC) and be reached at (833) SCC-KIDS (722-5437). A 2022 California called AB506 makes all "regular" volunteers mandated reporters as well.

Response Plan

1. When an allegation of abuse is brought to the attention of a designated care person, the designated care person should immediately arrange a meeting with the complainant and any other witnesses to clarify the allegation.
2. If the complainant is a minor, the church staff should meet with the child's parents, notifying them of the incident and the steps that are being taken, as well as offering support and prayer.
3. If the alleged perpetrator is a volunteer, the pastoral staff will:
 - a. Meet with the volunteer to notify them that an allegation has been made and will be investigated by local authorities. If the volunteer is a minor this meeting should also include their parent(s).
 - b. Inform the volunteer that he/she may not participate in children's or youth ministry until the investigation into the allegation is complete.
 - c. Offer support and prayer during the investigation.
4. The church will report any allegation of abuse to the local police and child protective services.
5. The pastoral staff will also make note of the allegation and its outcome on the volunteer's confidential application form, as well as the allegation's outcome.
6. If the alleged perpetrator is a staff member, then another pastoral staff member and/or the board chair will:
 - a. Meet with the staff member and notify them that an allegation has been made and will be investigated by local authorities as well as the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC) conference office.
 - b. The conference office should be notified immediately. They will assist the church through the process and notify the ECC's Ordered Ministry who will be involved in the investigation.
 - c. Inform the staff member that he/she may not participate in children's or youth ministry until the investigation into the allegation is complete.
 - d. Offer support and prayer during the investigation.
7. Notation of the allegation and its outcome will be made in the staff person's confidential file.
8. The pastoral staff and/or church chair will report the allegation to police, conference office, and insurance company.
9. Written records can be subpoenaed.

Visit www.the-river.org/safety/ for Safeguarding Team Policy and Procedures, as well as how to submit a concern

VOLUNTEERS - TAKE THE HANDBOOK QUIZ HERE:

<https://forms.gle/r342NqFrtsJSB2KA9>