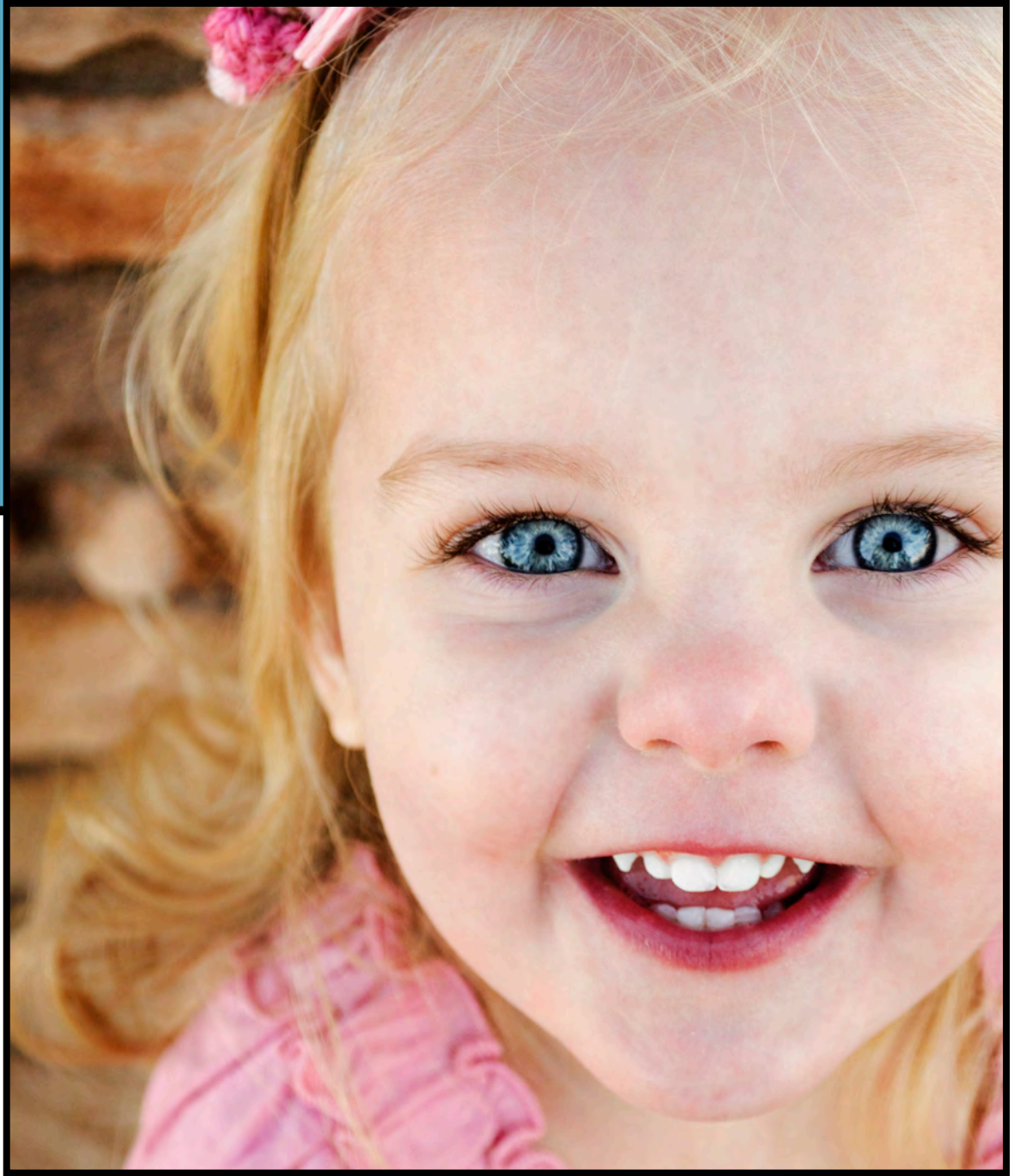


2011-
2012



AUSTIN

RIDGE KIDS

parent handbook

Parent Handbook

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Children's Ministry Philosophy

The Children's Ministry exists to assist parents in the spiritual formation of their children. Our goal is to help children become followers of Jesus Christ by:

- Teaching children the gospel of Jesus Christ, not just Bible stories or moral lessons.
- Using methods of instruction and interaction that are both excellent and age-appropriate.

We believe that only the Gospel can change children, families, neighborhoods and schools. As we minister the Gospel to children, we are participating in ARBC's larger vision of city transformation.

THE THREE PILLARS...

There are three pillars that support Austin Ridge's philosophy of ministry to parents and children, rising from the book of Deuteronomy where Moses gives his final instructions to Israel. Chapters four and six especially provide illustrations of some of the Biblical footings beneath these pillars.

I. God is Central in All Parenting and Teaching

Moses makes it very clear that all our teaching should be characterized by the centrality of God.

a) God is the goal of our teaching.

... so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the Lord your God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments. (Deuteronomy 6:2 NAS)

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 NAS)

b) God is the source of our teaching.

You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his testimonies, and his statutes which he has commanded you and you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord." (Deuteronomy 6:17, 18a NAS)

c) God is the main character in all our teaching.

The Lord brought us up out of Egypt with a mighty hand... The Lord showed great and distressing signs and wonders... He [the Lord] brought us out from there... (Deuteronomy 6:22-23 NAS)

Although most Christian parents and leaders would affirm the centrality of God in all things, not all have taught and parented in a way that enables young disciples to recognize and embrace this truth. Many of the resources available to parents and leaders stop short of this most essential reality. The centrality of God must be a constant refrain in all our various forms of teaching. Young disciples must be helped to recognize in concrete ways how God relates to absolutely everything in life. We must help them see that God's ultimate purpose in everything is His glory.

II. Children Must Learn to Love and Fear the Lord

... so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the Lord your God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments. (Deuteronomy 6:2)

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:4,5)

The outcome of a child's faith is not guaranteed by having parents who faithfully nurture faith in their children, nor

is it guaranteed by being active in a church that diligently strives to teach and equip parents and children. No child or adult can come to Jesus unless the Father draws them. No parents have any hope of their children being saved without the regenerating work of God taking their hearts of stone and turning them into hearts of flesh.

Nevertheless we are commanded to teach our children to fear and love the Lord. The church and the home provide an environment where God often does His saving work in the heart. Our obedience to God and our faithfulness as parents does not ultimately save our children from wrath, but it is very often the means by which God saves our children. Similarly, our disobedience and unfaithfulness as parents does not necessarily condemn our children, but is often the means by which our children are led to destruction. God has ordained that parents bear the responsibility of acquainting their children with the Word of God and the life of faith. Our success in this endeavor matters more to Him than it does to us, and He has made all the resources of heaven available to us. Therefore, we as parents and as a congregation must be faithful to teach our children "to fear the Lord and to keep all His statutes and commandments and to love the Lord with all [our] heart."

Statutes and commandments can easily be taught so that a child can remember them and repeat them back. We can also train our children to conduct themselves in certain ways and to maintain behavior which portrays godliness. However, these things are not enough. Teaching them to "fear" and to "love" God in the fullest sense of those words is our greatest challenge. We want our children to not only know the truth but to embrace it with all their hearts lest it be said of them:

For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks to Him. (Romans 1:21)

They profess to know God but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed. (Titus 1:16)

Our children can know all about God. They can know endless Bible stories, and even have vast portions of Scripture memorized and yet not honor God or have fellowship with Him. They can live their lives knowing who God is and yet never meet Him until they meet Him at the judgment seat and hear Him say, "Depart from Me. I never knew you."

When we teach children we must aim for their hearts as well as their heads. Although most of us believe this, we feel that more effort needs to be made to raise the expectations of parents and leaders of what God might do in the heart of a child in response to hearing the truth.

Curriculum and practical teaching methods can guide parents and leaders in aiming for the heart of their children but these will be largely ineffective without work on three very significant fronts.

a) The prerequisite for nurturing faith in children is that parents and leaders must love God and love His word. It is almost impossible to teach something you have not experienced. Children will not be excited about God unless those that are teaching them are excited about God. God will not be real to them if He is not real to us. If God is not real to the parent or leader, if His word is not treasured and respected, then imparting a true love for God and His Word is almost impossible. Therefore, parents and leaders must be diligent in keeping their own hearts alive for the sake of their children.

b) A healthy love and fear of God is more easily cultivated in children that have a healthy love for and fear of their parents. It is very difficult for children to learn to honor God if they defy their parents and resist their authority. It is very difficult to nurture a reverence for God and humility before Him when children are permitted to treat parents and adults in general with disrespect. As a church we must be very earnest in our efforts to help our people be courageous parents. The permissiveness that is encouraged and taught in our culture, and which is rampant in the American church, not only makes life miserable for those who have to be with our children but can lead our children to destruction.

Discipline your son while there is hope; do not set your heart on his destruction. (Proverbs 19:18)

c) We can model, teach and discipline in a way which encourages the heart to respond but only the Holy Spirit can effectually change the heart of the child. Therefore, priority must be given to intercession in any ministry to children and their parents.

III. Parents are Responsible for Discipling their Children

. . . so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the Lord your God . . . you shall teach [God's words] diligently to your sons . . . when your son asks you . . . then you shall say to your son . . . (Deuteronomy 6: 2, 7, 21)

Biblically it is very difficult to minimize the importance of the family in redemption. Like everything else, God created families for His glory and to make His glory known to the ends of the earth. God did not reveal Himself to every generation in the same way He revealed Himself to Moses. He intended for the truth about His character and His deeds and His will to be communicated by parents to their children. This text clearly places the responsibility upon parents to make sure their children know and fear the Lord. The Biblical expectation is that parents will acquaint their children with the Word of God and the life of faith, and equip them for service in the kingdom. Therefore, more than anyone else in the world, parents must be committed to the instruction and the spiritual well-being of their children.

This has several implications for how the church ought to be engaged in ministry to children.

a) Austin Ridge Bible Church should not usurp God-ordained, parental responsibility; but rather, the church should equip, support, and encourage parents in their vital role. Two chapters earlier in Deuteronomy 4:10, Moses reminds the people of what the Lord said: Assemble the people to me that I may let them hear my words so that they may learn to fear me all the days they live on the earth and that they may teach their children. (NASB)

If children must learn to "fear the Lord," their parents must first fear the Lord. If parents must teach their children, they first must be taught themselves. Therefore, a major responsibility of the church is to "assemble the people" and teach them to "fear the Lord."

b) Austin Ridge is a community of believers who have made a covenant to "educate our children in the Christian faith." Therefore, the church must be engaged in helping each member of this large family live up to this calling and responsibility.

Most parents expecting a child will attend several weeks of classes before the birth so that they will be well equipped when the "blessed moment" arrives. Following the birth there are volumes of resources that could be consumed to help parents know how to care for their child and what to anticipate at each stage of development. Our society has much to offer parents in raising physically healthy children, but it is the role of the church to provide resources and support that will help parents raise spiritually healthy children.

As part of a church, parents are tapped into a collective body of wisdom and a network of support and encouragement that can aid them in their parenting responsibility. This is especially important given the reality of single-parent homes, "unequally yoked" marriages and spiritually dysfunctional families. The church is in a unique position to help stand in the gap for children and parents who find themselves in less-than-ideal situations.

c) The spread of the Gospel and the future of Austin Ridge is at stake. In his final instructions to Israel, Moses warns the people again and again to listen carefully and teach children diligently because their future in the land was at stake. If they forget the things which he was teaching them and act corruptly Moses warns:

. . . you shall perish quickly from the land . . . you shall not live long on it but shall be utterly destroyed. And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples and you shall be left few in number among the nations. (Deuteronomy 4: 26, 27 NAS)

Often, we can be very short-sighted when we approach Christian discipleship. Are we keeping the children occupied while the adults have their meeting or are we investing in the next generation of leaders at Austin Ridge? Are we merely teaching children to obey their parents and to share with their brother or sister, or are we strategically and consistently teaching them in a way that communicates the calling on their life to teach their children who will teach their children to fear the Lord and to walk in His ways? Are we merely providing our young disciples a fun experience at church to help them form meaningful relationships with their peers, or are we diligently establishing traditions in the church and within our families that will endure across generations and establish the people of tomorrow's Austin Ridge firm in their faith? A strategy for ministry to children and their parents must be very explicit and pro-active in pursuing a vision for future generations lest we be left "few in number among the nations."

WHAT SHOULD I BE DOING AT HOME TO TRAIN MY CHILD SPIRITUALLY?

There is no more important influence in the life of a child than the influence of the home. In the Old Testament, it is quite clear that the father was the pastor of his family. He represented God. He was responsible not only for morals and behavior but for teaching his children. The home was a "little church" where the father taught his family God's commands and led them in worship of the one true God.

The home is the front line of ministry to children—not the Sunday school or public church gathering. All the practices present in a Christian worship service—the Scriptures, prayer, and praise—should be present in the home as well.

However, these practices should not be done in a mechanical, abstract manner, "by rote," as if it were some sort of a drill. Teaching children can neither be done in a negative, repressive, or manipulative manner. This violates both the child's personality and God's way of salvation. Rather the truths of God should be taught in an atmosphere of love.

Know this as well: Creatively teaching the Bible to kids is not limited to an intentional time of family worship. As parents, we must make God's word prominent throughout our lives and conversations. Children learn as much from what we do as from what we say. And kids have lots of questions that present us with opportunities to teach the truth. A father once told the story of how he used his daughter's disappointment about a broken toy as an opportunity to teach about how Adam and Eve "broke the world." Such "teachable moments" arise more often than we realize.

WHY IS THE GOSPEL SO IMPORTANT? CAN'T THIS WAIT UNTIL MY CHILD IS OLDER?

Many children's ministry curriculums use Bible stories (David and Goliath, Daniel and the Lion's Den, etc.) to teach moral lessons (Be courageous!). These materials may accurately summarize the facts of the Bible story, but they draw a lesson from the story that the biblical author did not intend. The tendency is to draw moral lessons ("do this" or "don't do that") rather than seeing God's actions in history to save humanity. We believe that the stories of the Bible are not moralistic fables about the adventures of certain individuals who lived long ago. The Bible reveals God's plan to save humanity from sin through Jesus' death and resurrection. The Bible is a book about Jesus. The curriculum used by the Children's Ministry is designed to make the character of God and person and work of Jesus central in every story and lesson.

We also believe that children, just like adults, need Jesus' saving love (Romans 3:23; 6:23). When we teach children about God's plan to save humanity, it is necessary to teach them their personal need for the Savior. We do not flatter or deceive children by teaching them that their nature is good and only needs to be developed. Rather, we tenderly teach a child about his or her own failures—pointing out the specific sins to which children are prone (lying, disobedience to parents, etc.). Our goal is to be tender but true. We pray that the Holy Spirit will use the truth to bring conviction to the child's heart and conscience, and ultimately to give the gift of faith.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "METHODS OF INSTRUCTION AND INTERACTION THAT ARE BOTH EFFECTIVE AND AGE-APPROPRIATE"?

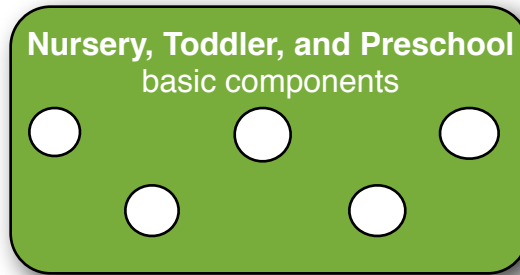
A child's basic attitude toward God, His Word, and His church is formed from the attitudes and actions of the adults in their lives during their earliest years. Psalm 78:5-7 states:

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

The philosophy of education for the Children's Ministry is modeled after the progression found in these verses. From their earliest years, our infants are taught basic Bible doctrines and stories as they are spoken in blessings and prayers. Our toddlers see and memorize basic Bible truths. In our elementary small groups, there is an emphasis on knowing how the major Bible doctrines and stories are related. Children learn Bible themes, start to read the Bible for themselves, and are taught to apply the Bible's promises to their lives. Our goal is that they will in turn be prepared to tell the next generation.

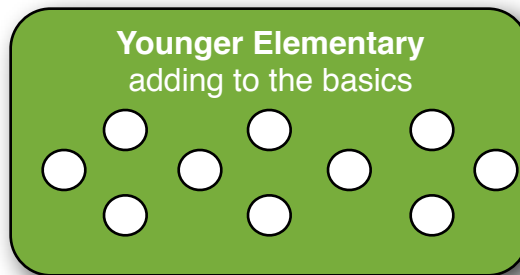
Stage 1: Nursery, Toddlers, and Preschool (Ages 1-5)

In our Toddler and Preschool classes we begin to teach the vocabulary of faith by presenting Bible stories, basic doctrines, and memory verses. Even children this young are able to acquire proper beliefs and learn what God requires of them and begin their journey of knowing Him.



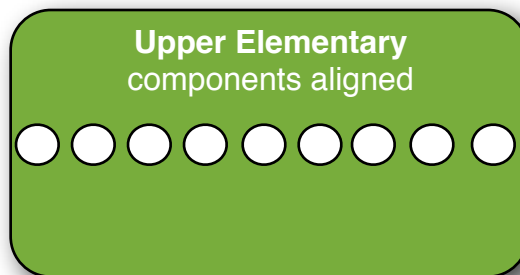
Stage 2: Younger Elementary (Grades K-2)

In our Younger Elementary small groups we teach stories from the entire Bible. The students begin to learn biblical truths and gain some familiarity with how they relate to one another. Chronology is considered in this age-group, but it is periodically ignored; children at this age cannot handle it developmentally. They continue to add basic truths to their repertoire, learning the different kinds of doctrines and how they relate to each other. This is essential before moving ahead in their faith journey.



Stage 3: Upper Elementary (Grades 3-5)

Our Upper Elementary small groups integrate Bible stories around certain unifying themes such as worship, grace, missions, sharing your faith, trusting God, and Children's Ministry leaders of God. Because students at this age are developing skills of conceptual thinking, discovery of truths from Scripture through comparing, contrasting and analyzing is emphasized. From a doctrinal standpoint, this age-group begins to organize their individual beliefs and basic doctrinal understandings together thematically.



POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT OF ME AS A PARENT? WHAT SHOULD I BRING?

Parents are requested to use only disposable diapers while at church. Please bring an adequate supply of disposable diapers and wipes as well as an extra change of clothes for all infants and toddlers.

Please bring only plastic bottles or cups for milk, juice, or water.

Parents should label all items (such as bottles, cups, diaper bags, wipe containers, clothing, pacifiers, etc.) with their child's first and last name.

Parents should notify coordinators and leaders of any allergy or special circumstances their child may have.

Parents are encouraged to keep immunizations up-to-date.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY A "CARING AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT THAT FOSTERS RELATIONSHIP SKILLS"?

Ensuring a safe environment is crucial to our mission. We observe the following policies for the safety and security of all children and volunteers.

General Safety and Security Policies

All the Children's Ministry leaders must have completed a thorough volunteer application, submitted to a criminal background/reference check and have been asked to serve by a member of the the Children's Ministry leadership team. Anyone convicted of child abuse or a related offense may not serve with the Children's Ministry.

Student workers must be 12 years old (or entered 6th grade) to volunteer in Children's Ministry. It is preferred that ARBC students be involved in the worship services of their age-appropriate ministry (Junior High or High School), while serving in the Children's Ministry during another service. Only 15 year old (or entered 9th grade) student workers and older are allowed to serve in a 1 yr. old room. Only students 18 years old will be allowed to serve in an infant room.

All Children's Ministry leaders receive training which covers our philosophy of ministry, policies and procedures, curriculum and guidelines for effective and age-appropriate teaching.

All small groups are staffed by a team of two or more Children's Ministry leaders. Under no circumstances is a child to be left in a room or anywhere unattended. A parent must stay with a child until a leader arrives.

The Children's Ministry has an open policy so that all parents/guardians have access to their children at all times. If you need to check on your child, please ask a Children's Ministry leader or staff member to assist you. Going into the room may upset your child (he or she may think that it is time to go) and it may upset the other children as well. Please feel free to check on your children through the windows and room doors.

Secure Check-in/Check-out Procedure

Small groups will open 10 minutes prior to regularly scheduled church activities and will close 10 minutes after the completion of our worship service.

A registration form will be completed for each family the first time that a child attends the Children's Ministry. The form is used to create an electronic file for your child in the Children's Ministries computer check-in system. Guests must attend worship services four times within a two month period in order to receive an assigned check-in tag. All children must be checked-in at the appropriate computer check-in station. Upon check-in you will receive a claim ticket that matches the alphanumeric code on your child's name tag. In the event you lose your claim ticket, you will be asked to show your driver's license. Your child's safety is our first priority even if it requires extra time.

- Please take your child to the restroom before checking him or her in.
- Please pick up your child promptly after the worship service.
- Please note that for security purposes, only designated ministry leaders are allowed in the small group rooms.
- Please do not send your children to their small group with toys, dolls, electronic devices, or other items that may distract them or their peers during their time at church.

If for any reason, you are needed during the worship service, you will be paged on the large screens using the alphanumeric code from your claim ticket. Parents will be notified after 15 minutes if their child remains inconsolable and unable to adjust. Regular attendance and positive conversations about church will alleviate most separation anxiety problems.

Only parents, legal guardians, or individuals they designate may retrieve a child from the Children's Ministry area. Parents must present the appropriate claim ticket before their child will be released.

Sickness Policy

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

We define an infectious disease as any disease that spreads from one person to another person. These may include, but are not limited to, HIV, tuberculosis, hepatitis, etc. We believe that God has called us to minister to all people and will, therefore, strive to provide a secure environment that is safe and accepting of everyone. If you have a child with an infectious disease (as defined above), please inform one of our Children's Ministry staff members so we can effectively minister to your child, while providing a safe environment for our leaders and other children.

Children who appear, or become, ill at church will be isolated from the other children, and the parent/guardian will be paged immediately.

Parents are asked to contact a member of the the Children's Ministry leadership team if their child contracts a communicable disease (such as chicken pox, head lice, fifth disease, etc.) after attending a Children's Ministry gathering.

The medical condition of any child or Children's Ministry leader will be disclosed only to the extent necessary to minimize the health risk to the person and others. ARBC's elders and the Children's Ministry leadership team will be provided with the appropriate information concerning any special precaution that may be necessary. The Children's Ministry will not disclose the health status of any individual without the express written consent and permission of that individual, or in the case of a child, their parent or guardian. Parents of children involved in Children's Ministry activities will not be privy to any confidential medical information.

The Children's Ministry sickness policy exists for the protection of the children in our care. We regret that it sometimes means not admitting children that have been brought to our public gatherings.

Food Policies

Feeding young children is a serious responsibility. Children should be fed before coming to church. Infants will be given formula, milk, juice, or water when parents provide these items and written instructions.

If there are any special feeding instructions for your child, please put this information in writing. In the Nursery, a feeding instructions form will be provided at the room door.

A snack of water or juice and crackers (e.g. Goldfish, animal crackers, Ritz, Saltines, etc.) will be served to children from one to five years old. If lesson plans call for any snacks or food tasting other than these, the small group leader will post an "Allergy Alert" at the room door. Please let the small group leader know if your child may not taste these foods or has an allergy.

Restroom and Diaper Policy

Adult staff volunteers may accompany children to the restroom and stand outside while the child uses the restroom. If children need assistance or supervision while in the restroom, more than one adult must always be present. No adult will ever be alone with a child.

It is the policy of the Children's Ministry that all diaper changes and toilet assistance will be done in the presence of another adult. To protect children and adults, male Children's Ministry leaders will not change diapers.

Discipline Policy

The effective spiritual formation of all our children requires a stable environment. The role of the Children's Ministry is to support and supplement parental training by upholding high standards of behavior, respect and discipline. Some of the expectations we have for your child include:

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

If your child is being disruptive or unruly, volunteers are trained to give the child verbal warnings and to place the child in "time out" if disobedience persists. If these measures do not resolve the issue, we will page you and ask you to remove your child from the room.

If a child bites while attending a church activity, the parents will be paged and asked to take the child out of the group for the rest of the service.

Since our goal is to assist you in the effective training and instruction of your child, Children's Ministry leaders will talk with you about any consistent behavioral problems we are experiencing with your child. Sometimes kids will be kids, and we're okay with that! But Scripture does teach that proper training and expectations are crucial to raising godly children (Proverbs 22:6). A major goal during all disciplinary situations is to help children see that they have sinned against God and their neighbor and to encourage asking for and extending forgiveness.

No child at ARBC will be subject to: corporal punishment (including, but not limited to, rough handling, ear pulling, shaking, slapping, hitting and spanking); emotional abuse (including, but not limited to, name calling, shaming, threatening, humiliation, or yelling); or the use of physical restraint (unless restraint is necessary to protect others from harm). If any leader or staff is guilty of inappropriate action toward a child, he or she may be subject to discipline by the church.

Sanitation and Hygiene Policies

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

Strict hand washing with soap and water is of utmost importance in preventing the spread of infection. All personnel in the Children's Ministry will be instructed on proper hand washing techniques and appropriate times to wash their hands.

All linens will be laundered after each individual use. They are not shared among different children during one session.

Mattresses, toys, and furniture will be washed with disinfectant solution after each use.

Suspicion of Abuse or Neglect

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

Emergency Action Plan

First Aid — Although we strive to maintain the safest environment possible, it is known that the nature of children's activities occasionally leads to accidents. A fully-equipped first aid kit is accessible in our building per the discretion of the the Children's Ministry leadership team.

It is the policy of the Children's Ministry to first notify the child's parents in the event of a medical incident. In the event that the parents are not immediately available, Children's Ministry leaders will administer appropriate treatment measures such as applying pressure or a bandage to a bleeding wound. No pharmacological treatment, oral or topical, will be administered. Life-threatening situations will, of course, be handled as emergencies with appropriate treatment measures being immediately instituted. 911 and parents will be notified immediately. ARBC will not be responsible for any "Good Samaritan" assistance offered by any of its members.

Fire — In the event of a fire, Children's Ministry leaders have been trained to remain calm, count all children in the room and lead the children out of the building in an organized, quick fashion.

- **Building A:**
 - Nursery children will be transported in evacuation cribs into the front parking lot.
 - Preschoolers will be evacuated to the field behind Building A.
 - Elementary children will be evacuated to the field behind Building A.
- **Building C:** 3rd-5th will be evacuated to parking lot #4 located behind Buildings C and D.
- **Building D:** Nursery children will be transported in evacuation cribs into the front parking lot.

Tornadoes, Storms, and Severe Weather — Children will be calmly escorted to an enclosed part of the building, such as an inside hallway, stairwell, or interior room. They will be taught how to sit with their back against the wall, knees tucked under their chins, arms wrapped around the knees, and head bent down. All children will be accounted for and efforts will be made to calm and entertain the children.

- **Building A** - Nursery children should be taken into the bathrooms within their rooms.
Preschoolers will be evacuated to room 208, the Kerplunk room.
- **Building D** - Nursery children should be taken into the bathrooms within their rooms. Children in rooms 101 and 102 should be taken to the interior classroom across the hall and into their bathrooms.

Children's Ministry Leadership Team

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From left to right: Amy Smith, Emily, John, Amy Taylor, Bobby

