



NEXTGEN AT THE MILL

kids and students

Policy on Working with Minors

Spring 2023

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**Base policy material created by MinistrySafe; program-specific material added by Church at The Mill.*

A NOTE FROM DR. TRIPP ATKINSON



Dear NextGen Leaders,

Thank you. Thank you for answering the call to be used by God in a significant way as a vital part of the NextGen team. On this team, it is important to understand your role, your responsibility, and the incredible opportunity you have to impact lives for eternity.

Your Role. You are not a number, a quota, or a placeholder. You are a caretaker, a minister, and a representative of Jesus Christ to the Next Generation. You are an invaluable part of the body of Christ that is uniquely gifted and called to make a difference in the Kingdom of God. Whatever your role or job description, you are vital to the mission and ministry of Church at The Mill to impact families in our community and far beyond.

Your Responsibility. Your responsibility as a NextGen leader should not be taken lightly. First and foremost, you have the duty to protect the precious children/students in your care. The physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual safety of our preschoolers, children, and students is our highest priority. A culture of safety protects our children, church, and YOU! It also paves the way for effective ministry as we build trust with children, parents, volunteer leaders, and staff.

In addition to our responsibility to protect, NextGen leaders have a responsibility to be committed, prepared, coachable, encouraging, and excellent in all we do. As we each give our individual best in service to God, we will all give our collective best in service to families.

Your Opportunity. As you serve, please don't miss the opportunity you have as a NextGen leader at Church at The Mill. We are a part of something special. God is working in ways in which only He can. We have the opportunity to not only have a front-row seat to what God is doing in the Next Generation but also to be used by Him to impact lives in a way that will shape generations. God has allowed us to see things on a weekly basis that some people never see in a lifetime. Let's humbly, graciously, and enthusiastically embrace the amazing opportunity we have been given.

Mindful of your role, responsibility, and opportunity, please diligently seek to understand our Safety Policy on the pages that follow. Doing so is foundational to the excellence to which we have been called.

On your team,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tripp Atkinson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. Tripp Atkinson
NextGen Pastor, Church at The Mill
404-989-8749

CATM SAFETY SYSTEM

Church at The Mill (CATM) requires all staff and volunteers working with minors (and other vulnerable populations) to complete **THREE SAFETY STEPS** before volunteer placement or work in ministry programming begins.

Step 1 Prerequisites

Spiritual Growth:

Prospective adult volunteer leaders should have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Ministry best happens as an overflow of one's own spiritual growth. We are not looking for perfect leaders but we do need leaders who prioritize their own spiritual growth and serve from a place of spiritual health.

Six-Month Rule:

Prospective Adult Volunteer Leaders must be actively involved with Church at The Mill for at least six months prior to serving in a position involving the custody and control of minors. Participating in worship and a small group are great ways to get involved.

Church Membership:

While church membership may not be required for short-term special events, it is required for ongoing involvement with programming. It is important that NextGen Adult Volunteer Leaders are also committed to being a part of the Church at The Mill family.

Step 2 Screening Process

Application:

Each adult that works with minors is required to complete an application as the first step in evaluating if NextGen Ministries is a good fit for service. The application includes signing off on CATM Beliefs, Lifestyle Covenant, and an overview of CATM's Policy on Working with Minors.

Background Check:

Once we receive your application, the screening process continues with a criminal background check.

Interview:

Prospective Adult Volunteer Leaders will meet with a CATM staff member to discuss application and ministry placement.

Reference Check:

An authorized CATM staff member will contact references for each Adult Volunteer Leader applicant.

Step 3 Training

Awareness Training:

Each adult that works with minors is required to complete an online Sexual Abuse Awareness Training through our partners at Ministry Safe. This training equips our team with a better understanding of abuser characteristics, the abuser's grooming process, and common grooming

behaviors. It also provides clear direction on reporting suspicious behavior. This training better prepares our team to maintain a safe environment for every child and student.

Policy / Handbook Training:

It is the responsibility of each NextGen Adult Volunteer Leader to understand CATM's Policy on Working with Minors and the procedures that support this policy. Training on all policies and procedures will be provided for each prospective Adult Volunteer Leader.

Onboarding & Placement of New Leaders

After completing the three safety steps, Adult Volunteer Leaders can expect the following:

OBSERVATION

Upon successful completion of Screening and Training, Adult Volunteer Leaders will be scheduled to observe programming in their area of interest. Adult Volunteer Leaders will typically be asked to observe for two weeks.

ASSESSMENT

After two weeks of observation, the volunteer will meet with CATM staff to review their observation experience and discuss ministry placement.

COMMITMENT/SCHEDULING

If both volunteer and staff feel good about moving forward with placement, a commitment will be made by the volunteer and they will be scheduled for ministry service. Except for special events, NextGen staff will typically seek a one-year commitment from leaders. (Of course, if the ministry placement is not a good fit, it can be changed at any time.)

CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT

CATM's commitment to all Adult Volunteer Leaders is to provide ongoing training and development. Our commitment is to put each leader in the best possible position to succeed and find fulfillment in ministry. NextGen staff will provide regular team training meetings as well as online resources.

NEXTGEN SAFETY POLICY

Zero Abuse Tolerance

Church at The Mill has zero tolerance for abuse in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer at CATM to act in the best interest of all children/students in every program.

REPORTING ABUSE OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE

In order to maintain a safe environment for our children, Church at The Mill staff and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies. All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to an immediate supervisor in the ministry area, the NextGen Pastor, or the Executive Pastor.

Violation of child safety policy or failure to report violations of others to the designated person is grounds for termination (employee) or removal (volunteer).

We report all suspected or alleged abuse or neglect of children to the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS).

Abuse Hotline: 1-888-227-3487

Because many adults are unfamiliar with South Carolina's reporting requirements and may be fearful of the process, Church at The Mill utilizes a 'tandem or dual report' model, where permitted. A 'dual report' occurs when a CATM supervisor reports the suspicion or allegation together with the individual who saw, heard, or received information causing him or her to suspect abuse or neglect.

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

NO PERMISSION IS NEEDED from CATM before reporting to law enforcement personnel or the Child Abuse Hotline.

Please report all suspicions of child abuse or neglect (or any inappropriate or 'grooming' behaviors of a colleague or coworker) to an immediate supervisor or a member of the NextGen Safety Committee. This request is intended to assist the church in properly protecting minors involved in CATM programs.

When in doubt, report.

Law enforcement officers can also file reports of potential abuse or neglect and ask DSS to investigate. If we believe a child to be in immediate physical danger, we will involve police officers on campus or call 911.

NEXTGEN SAFETY COMMITTEE

The NextGen Safety Committee will enable CATM NextGen Ministries to carry out appropriate ministry activities while safeguarding program participants against emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. The Committee will meet quarterly to review policy and safety practices. They will serve as the Sexual Abuse Task Force Liaison Team.

COMPOSITION

The Safety Committee will be comprised of the following members:

- Executive Pastor
- NextGen Pastor
- NextGen Director
- Children's Pastor
- Student Pastor

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Safety Committee will be charged with the following duties:

1. Applying existing CATM policies and procedures related to the safety of minors and risk management issues.
2. Monitoring all NextGen Ministry programs for ongoing compliance with safety policies.
3. Making recommendations to the CATM Senior Leadership team regarding safety issues.



MONITORING PLAN

Building Safety

Every ministry program area is monitored during programming serving children/students. No minor will be left unsupervised in a ministry area or on a playground during regular programming or activities.

Restricted Access Only parents (dropping off children), approved ministry volunteers, church staff members, and children/students attending their programming are allowed in areas where ministry to minors is occurring. All other adults should be asked for identification and immediately escorted out of the area. If questions or concerns arise related to any person in the area, a ministry supervisor or safety team member should be notified immediately.

Safety Team Trained CATM Safety Team personnel will monitor all designated building entry points for regular NextGen programming and activities.

Video Surveillance In an effort to ensure the safest possible environments for our children/students, video surveillance is utilized throughout our NextGen programming areas.

Supervision

“Two Adult Rule”

There should always be at least two screened, trained adults over the age of 18 present during children and student activities, regardless of the number of children/students present. If only two adults are present, they should not be related. If relatives are serving together, another approved adult over the age of 18 should also be present.

Adult Leaders should avoid being alone with an individual child in any room, area, or during any ministry program. If one supervising adult must leave a group of children, another volunteer or employee must be notified so that the “Two Adult Rule” can be followed. Adult leaders and staff should work hard to protect each other from being put in one-on-one situations with kids or students.

Classroom

If one of the adult leaders is late to arrive or has to leave the classroom for any reason:

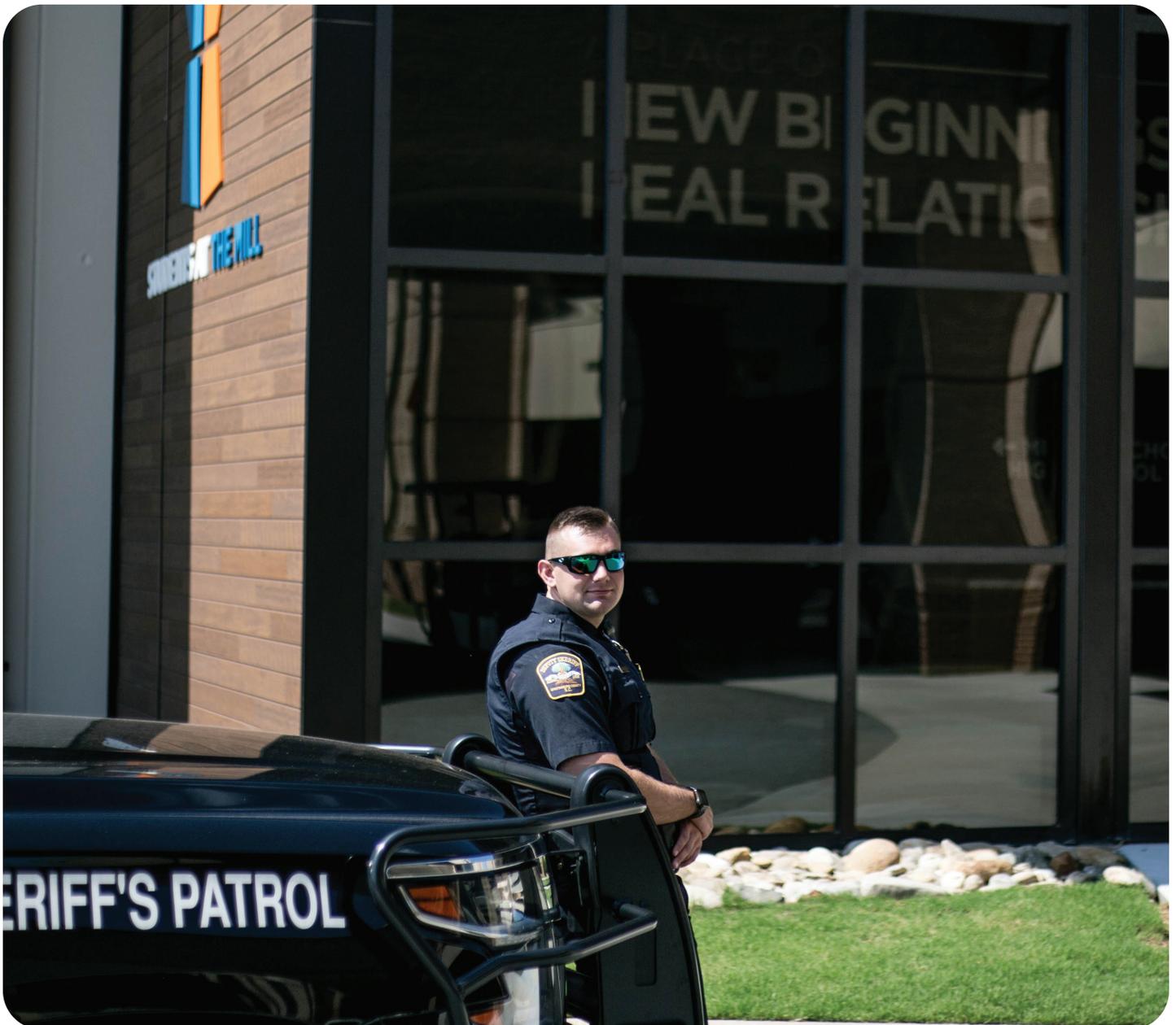
- Notify another volunteer or staff member for assistance.
- The door to the classroom should be left open until an additional leader arrives.

- In the rare event an Adult Volunteer Leader knows they will be absent from ministry programming, the appropriate CATM staff should be notified as soon as possible to arrange a substitute.

Playground/Rec Areas

On the playground and recreation areas, remember to circulate, watching children/students during play periods, giving particular attention to areas not easily seen from all viewpoints. (Example: under slides, in corners, behind structures).

Adult leaders should **NEVER** be alone with a child or student (of any gender).



SAFETY MEASURES

Worker to Child/Student Ratios

Church at The Mill is committed to providing adequate supervision in all NextGen Ministry programs. Accordingly, the following worker-to-child/student ratios will be observed:

PROGRAM	WORKERS	CHILDREN
Nursery	2	6
Preschool (2 & 3 year old)	2	12
Preschool (4 & 5 year old)	2	18
Elementary	2	20
Middle School	2	20
High School	2	20

Check-In

Kids Ministry

Upon check-in, each child will receive a nametag and their parent or guardian will be given a claim tag. Volunteers must match the parent claim tag to the child's name tag before releasing a child at pick-up.

**If a claim tag is lost, send the parent or guardian to the Kids at The Mill (KATM) check-in desk, where proper identification must be shown to a staff member before the child is released. (Have the child stay in the classroom; the parent may pick up the child once cleared.)*

Student Ministry

Middle and High School Students will check themselves in and will not be issued a nametag.

Release of Kids/Students

Kids Ministry

Kids Ministries staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing children in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities. Those picking up children must present a claim tag that matches the nametag on the child. It is presumed a person who drops off a child or student has the authority to pick up the child.

If staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact their immediate supervisor or the Kid's Pastor before releasing the child.

Student Ministry

Middle and High School Students will be released at the conclusion of programming and parents do not need to be present. Students can only be released early with parental permission verified by a CATM staff member.

BEHAVIOR

Discipline

It is Church at The Mill's policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children. **NO form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. When a child is misbehaving, follow these steps:

- 1. Remind/Redirect:** Go to the child/student and calmly ask him or her to stop the behavior. (Most children/students respond immediately and correct the behavior.) Give a warning and remind the child/student of class expectations, and redirect to a positive behavior. Do this individually when possible. Try not to single out a specific child in a large group setting unless necessary.

**When working with younger children, some physical redirection may be necessary: for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child who is hitting another.*

- 2. Remove:** If the child/student repeats the action, guide them to a quiet place – separate from the other children/students – for a short but designated period of time. Stay within sight of others, and avoid being alone (or unseen) with the child/student.

Provide the child/student with a simple, understandable reason for the separation, and a clear explanation of your expectations.

(“Terry, you didn’t stop hitting Kelly when I asked you to, so it was necessary for me to separate you from the group.”)

- 3. Refer:** After a 3rd time, refer to a staff member. **A staff member** may inform a parent or guardian, who may be asked to become involved in redirecting misbehavior.

Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported to the ministry supervisor.

NEVER

Yell at a child/student.

Grab a child/student.

Threaten a child/student.

Hit a child/student.

Openly humiliate a child/student in front of the class.

Bullying

Verbal, physical, or emotional bullying is not acceptable in CATM ministry programs. At the first sign of bullying in any form, act decisively, and inform your ministry supervisor. There is no “harmless put-down” where bullying is concerned.

- 1. First Offense: Remind** Issue a warning to the child/student and a general reminder to the group that this kind of interaction is wrong. Try not to embarrass or chastise.
- 2. Second Offense: Remove** Pull the offending child(ren)/student(s) from the group (in a seen or supervised location) and discuss the inappropriate interaction or behavior. Set clear parameters and behavioral goals. Let the child/student know that the next step is communication with a pastor and the child's/student's parents. Notify an immediate supervisor of ANY signs of bullying or verbal abuse.

Privately, but with another adult present, confirm that a child/student who was the target of the bullying behaviors is not in danger of continued harassment and is physically and emotionally stable. **DO NOT SINGLE A CHILD/STUDENT OUT IN FRONT OF THE GROUP ... be discreet.**

- 3. Third Offense: Refer** Send the child/student to a pastor or ministry supervisor for a phone call (or communication onsite) with his or her parent(s) and possible removal from the activity or event.

RESTROOMS

Kids Ministry

Please note the specific restroom procedures by age group indicated below. Outside of procedures related to female Adult Volunteer Leaders assisting nursery or preschool children, Adult Volunteer Leaders are not to use or occupy a restroom in use by children.

Nursery/Preschool

Because nursery children may require complete assistance with their bathroom activities, all staff members and volunteers will observe and practice the following policies:

Diapering

- Only female Adult Volunteer Leaders, female staff, or the child's parent/legal guardian will undertake the diapering and toilet training of children of either sex.

- Changing of diapers and toilet training should be done in plain sight of other Adult Volunteer Leaders or with the door fully open for toilet training.
- Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.
- Children should be changed on changing stations only.

Toilet Training

- Only female nursery workers or the child’s parent or legal guardian will participate in toilet training efforts with children of either sex.
- When children are taken into bathrooms the door will be left fully open.
- Parents should be consulted on each child’s progress in the toilet training process before leaving the child with volunteers or staff members.
- If necessary, children should be assisted, in sight of another adult, in straightening their clothing before returning to the room with other children.
- “Accidents” should be handled by reassuring the child and completing the changing of diapers or underwear and clothing. Extra clothing and diapers are available from CATM in the children’s area, if the parent has not furnished a clothing change.

Elementary

- Never go into the restroom alone with a minor.
- Only one child should be in a restroom stall at a time.
- If a child needs assistance, encourage them from the exterior bathroom door to do all they can for themselves.
- If physical assistance is needed, seek out a staff member to assess the situation and to assist the child in the presence of another Adult Volunteer Leader. Do not enter the restroom alone with a minor.
- All elementary children must be supervised by an Adult Volunteer Leader as they walk to and from the restroom.

Student Ministry

Never go into the restroom alone with a minor.

All-Access Special Needs Ministry

Please refer to All-Access Handbook for appropriate bathroom procedures for each age group.

MEDICATION

Do not administer medication to any child/student while serving in ministry programs, including “over the counter” drugs. Medication can only be administered by approved medical personnel and with parental permission.

TRANSPORTATION

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for children/students. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when adult volunteer leaders or staff are involved in the transportation of children/students:

- Staff members and volunteers should never transport minors by themselves.
- Parent notification and written permission is required before any minor can be transported. Outside of CATM trips and activities that require a parent permission form, written permission can be given via text message (which creates a permanent digital verification of permission).
- Minors should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided.
- Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with minors while in vehicles.
- No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving CATM buses, or vehicles owned or rented by CATM, unless in an emergency.
- No drivers under age 25 may drive CATM owned or rented vehicles.



INTERACTIONS WITH KIDS/STUDENTS

Verbal Interactions

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and children/students should be positive and uplifting. Church at The Mill staff members and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of children/students.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to children/students in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff members and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children/students.

One-to-One Interactions

Meetings with minors outside of ministry programs are allowed as long as meetings are not held in a private setting. The following guidelines should be observed:

- Communicate with a parent for permission to meet and to explain meeting details.
- Arrange meetings in a public setting. (i.e. Goodtree Cafe, CATM Concourse, etc.)
- Involve other adult leaders or students, if possible and appropriate.
- Communicate with parent immediately after the meeting.

Text communications create a permanent digital record of the time, location, and details of a meeting.



Appropriate Interaction/Touch

Church at The Mill is committed to protecting children in its care. To this end, CATM has implemented a 'physical contact policy' which promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our NextGen Ministry while protecting children/students.

We recognize that common expressions of affection, affirmation, support, physical caretaking, or sympathetic acts are appropriate in this community of caring Christians. Care must be taken, however, expressions of affection and affirmation are not excessive or imposed upon a preschooler, child, or student. Care must also be taken that adults do not act in a sexually stimulating way in front of preschoolers, children, or students.

The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in NextGen Ministry programs:

Appropriate

- Hugging, holding young children, pats on the back, and other forms of appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and children are important for children's development and are generally suitable in the church setting.
- For older children or students, examples of appropriate touch include high-fives, fist bumps, side hugs, and handshakes.

Inappropriate

- Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching, or displays of affection should be immediately reported to an immediate supervisor, the Children's Pastor, the Student Pastor, the NextGen Pastor, or the Executive Pastor.
- Physical contact and affection should be given only in the presence of other Adult Volunteer Leaders. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.

Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant child/student. A child's/student's preference not to be touched must be respected.

INTOXICANTS/TOBACCO USE

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any Church at The Mill facility, while traveling with minors, or while working with or supervising children/students. CATM also requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products (including cigarettes, e-cigarettes, vaping products, cigars, pipes, smokeless tobacco, or snuff) in church facilities, while in the presence of children, students, their parents, or during CATM activities or programs. CATM is a tobacco-free facility.

MODESTY/NUDITY

Staff members and Adult Volunteer Leaders in CATM NextGen Ministry should exercise reasonable modesty around children/students. Leaders should never be nude in the presence of minors in their care. In the event there is a situation that necessitates changing clothes (i.e. changing clothes during a pool party, weekend or overnight retreat, etc.), changing and showering should be done alone in a completely private setting.

PHOTO, VIDEO, AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

While we certainly encourage the celebration of our ministry on social media, Adult Volunteer Leaders should not take or post pictures/videos without permission and should be mindful of “no-photo” situations. Adult Volunteer Leaders should never tag kids/students in photos or offer any specific identifying information about them. This is to protect students and families. Please exercise extreme discretion in all social media posting.

AGE RESTRICTIONS FOR STUDENT VOLUNTEERS IN KIDS MINISTRY

Approved Middle School students can only serve in non-custodial care volunteer roles. (For example, they cannot serve in classrooms but may be able to serve with worship, crafts, or recreational teams.)

Approved High School students may be able to serve with children ages 3 through 5th grade.

No one under age 18 can serve with children ages birth through age 2.

FOOD POLICY

NextGen ministries do not serve nor do we allow nut-related snacks at programming.





**OVERVIEW OF
ADULT LEADER
POLICY
ON INTERACTING
WITH MINORS**

The following is an overview of CATM's policy on working with minors. These guidelines apply to all adults (staff or volunteers) working with minors (or any student still in Student Ministries) at Church at The Mill. The purpose of these guidelines is to protect our children, students, families, volunteers, staff, church, and the integrity of ministry to our children/students. Training on all policies and procedures will be a part of the onboarding process for new Adult Volunteer Leaders.

“Two Adult Rule”

- In ministry to kids and students, we adhere to a “Two Adult Rule” policy. Two trained, screened adults should supervise children at all times.
- If two individuals serving in a room are related to one another, a third unrelated volunteer or staff member must be present.
- Avoid being alone with an individual child in any room, area, or during any ministry program. If one supervising adult must leave a group of children, another volunteer or employee must be notified so that the “Two Adult Rule” can be followed.
- Adult Leaders and staff should work hard to protect each other from being put in one-on-one situations with kids or students.

Classroom

- If one of the adult leaders is late to arrive or has to leave the classroom for any reason:
 - Notify another volunteer or staff member for assistance.
 - The door to the classroom should be left open until an additional leader arrives.
- In the rare event an Adult Volunteer Leader knows they will be absent from ministry programming, the appropriate CATM staff should be notified as soon as possible to arrange a substitute.

Restroom

Nursery/Preschool

- Only female Adult Volunteer Leaders, female staff, or the child's parent / legal guardian will undertake the diapering and toilet training of children of either sex.
- Changing of diapers and toilet training should be done in plain sight of other Adult Volunteer Leaders or with the door partially open for toilet training.

Elementary

- Never go into the restroom alone with a minor.
- If a child needs assistance, encourage them from the exterior bathroom door to do all they can for themselves.

- If physical assistance is needed, seek out a staff member to assess the situation and assist the child in the presence of another Adult Volunteer Leader. Do not enter the restroom alone with a minor.

Students

Never go into the restroom alone with a minor.

All-Access Special Needs Ministry

Please refer to All-Access Handbook for appropriate bathroom procedures for each age group.

Transportation

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for children/students. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when volunteers or staff are involved in the transportation of children/students:

- Staff members and volunteers should never transport minors by themselves.
- Parent notification and written permission is required before any minor can be transported. Outside of CATM trips and activities that require a parent permission form, written permission can be given via text message (which creates a permanent digital verification of permission).
- Minors should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided.
- Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with minors while in vehicles.
- No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving CATM buses, or vehicles owned or rented by CATM, unless in an emergency.
- No drivers under age 25 may drive CATM-owned or rented vehicles.

Meeting with Minors

Meetings with minors outside of ministry programs are allowed as long as meetings are not held in a private setting. The following guidelines should be observed:

- Communicate with a parent for permission to meet and to explain meeting details.
- Arrange meetings in a public setting. (i.e. Goodtree Cafe, CATM Concourse, etc.)
- Involve other adult leaders or students, if possible and appropriate.
- Communicate with parent immediately after the meeting.

Age Restrictions

- Approved Middle School students can only serve in non-custodial care volunteer roles.
- Approved High School students may be able to serve with children ages 3 - 5th grade.
- No one under age 18 can serve with children ages birth through age 2.

NEXTGEN POLICY CAMPUS CONTACTS

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REVISED 4.19.23

**Local Law Enforcement
Authorities**

Emergency
911

Child Abuse Hotline
1-888-227-3487