**La Croix Family Safe Gatherings Policy**

**General Best Practices for All Age Groups**

The following are general best practices for all ministry areas. In some instances, it may be impossible to adhere to them, particularly in rural areas and smaller congregations. In those instances, use the knowledge you have learned in this course to come up with alternatives.

* *All workers should be at least four years older than the children or youth for whom they are responsible.*
* All leaders and volunteers must pass background checks and be trained with Safe Gatherings before serving.
* All leaders and volunteers in the ministry area should wear lanyards, name tags (with first and last name), or other identifiers.
* **It is never appropriate to be alone with a child at any age (other than your own). There must be two adults present at all times.**
* Workers should use responsible behaviors. They should not smoke or use or be under the influence of alcohol or drugs while volunteering.
* Photos of children should not be taken unless given permission by staff.
* Ministry partners should not post any specific names or negative behaviors on social media.
* Do not move a child to another classroom. Inform the Area Coordinator if there is a concern about the placement of a child.
* Parents are not allowed to stay in the classroom with their child unless they are serving and have a background check. Rule of thumb they need to leave within 5 minutes of dropping off their child
* If a child is sick (see safety procedures) or has a concerning behavior where their parents need to pick them up let the Area Coordinator know and they will contact the parents.
* When a child arrives in their area write down their name and tag code on the paper provided.
* Your church or organization should establish and post expectations and guidelines regarding check-in and ID policies, behavioral procedures, and bathroom procedures.

**Check-in and Identification Best Practices: Children, Birth to Grade 5 (Age 0 to 11)**

The category of "children" is considered to range from birth to age 11, or through grade 4. In situations related to this age group:

* Paperwork for each child should include:

	+ An information sheet/medical release form should be kept on file in the event of special needs or an emergency. This is particularly important for events when the parents may not be on-site.
	+ A form submitted by the parents should indicate the names of adults designated to pick up their child.
	+ An emergency contact form should indicate how and where the parents may be reached at all times, including cell phone numbers. ***Double check the form to make sure there is at least one cell phone number.***

* Identification policies can be relatively simple, like our pickup tag where the parent/guardian for each child gets a matching pickup tag at the entry door. If a parent does not have one, they need to go to the main Check-In desk to get a replacement tag. (tags do not have to be collect at pickup, just checked)

**General Best Practices for Working with Children, Birth to Grade 5 (Age 0 to 11)**

* There must be a minimum of two adults (18 years or older) present at all times. Workers should not be alone with a child.
* Establish pickup policies: Whoever is picking up the child must be 16 years or older with the matching pickup tag.

Worker/staff child ratios.

* **Infant (younger than 12 months)** — 1 trained adult: 3-4 infants
* **Young toddlers (12-23 months)** — 1 trained adult: 3-6 toddlers
* **Older toddler (2 years)** — 1 trained adult: 8 toddlers
* **Preschooler (3-5 years)** — 1 trained adult: 10 preschoolers
* **School age**: 1 trained adult: 15 school-age children
* **Mixed ages**: 1 trained adult: 8 ages

**Behavioral Best Practices: Birth to Grade 4 (Age 0 to 11)**

The following are best practices established for appropriate behavioral procedures when serving with children in this age group:

* Use positive words. Avoid words that could cause feelings of shame or condemnation, including degrading references to any physical, emotional, or other attributes such as, “Boys don’t cry,” “Good girls don't act like this,” or “You are bad.”
* Praise specific behaviors (e.g., “good listening” or, “Thank you for waiting.”) Use area expectation language: (3 Bees and Reigning Rules).
* Corporal punishment of any kind is never appropriate. Never restrain a child unless the child or another child is in danger. Call your Staff Area Coordinator immediately in this situation.
* Use a firm, gentle voice addressing and redirecting behavior (e.g., “You are running; please walk.”). Address the behavior; don’t focus on the child.  Use area expectation language: (3 Bees and Reigning Rules).
* Use age-appropriate “cool down” or withdrawal from activity. Help the child rejoin the group when he or she is ready.

Other best practices include:

* Actively listen to the child’s expression of anger or frustration. Don’t overreact. Seek to understand the underlying cause of any crisis.
* Communicate through verbal and nonverbal messages that you have faith in the child’s ability to practice self-control. When he or she is calm, encourage the child to explore possible solutions to the situation (use age-appropriate words).
* Inform your Staff Area Coordinators with behavior concerns and they will discuss behavior confidentially with parents when necessary. Share some good news and then discuss inappropriate behavior. Try to end on a positive note.
* “Need to know” Involve other staff in discussions, when necessary, but don’t speak about children or their parents to others.

**Physical Contact: Birth to Grade 4 (Age 0 to 11)**

Keep these best practices in mind when thinking about physical contact:

* Appropriate physical contact includes non-demanding, gentle touch of shoulders, hands, arms, head, or back; sitting child on leg (appropriate only at preschool level or younger); and gentle high fives, fist bumps, or shaking hands.
* Inappropriate physical contact includes kissing; requesting hugs and kisses; touching chest, genital region, upper legs, buttocks, waist, or stomach; sitting child in center of your lap; sitting child between legs; no piggyback rides; and seductiveness or suggestive contact.
* **Physical contact of any kind should be initiated by the child**. Touch done for the pleasure or satisfaction of the adult is **never**appropriate.
* Any touching used to express power or control over a child is not permitted.

**Bathroom Procedures: Birth to Grade 4 (Age 0 to 11)**

**It is inappropriate to be alone with a child of any age (other than your own) in the bathroom.**

**Infant**: Diapering should be done in the nursery by a parent/legal guardian, staff person, or regular ministry partner. Diapering should be done out in the open, never in a secluded area or without the presence of other workers. Closed bathroom doors are never permitted.

**Toddler potty training**: If a toddler has an accident in underwear/clothing, workers or staff can change the underwear/clothing. Unless indicated by the parent/guardian

**Children who are potty-trained**: These children can use the bathroom on their own unless special help is required, or the child is too young to use the restroom without assistance. For instance, a 2-year-old may be potty-trained, but the child may still need supervision for safety reasons. After the worker has ensured that the bathroom is clear, the worker should wait outside the bathroom door, which should remain slightly open. Workers should never be in a closed-door situation with a child or assist him or her without the child’s request and another worker present.

**Children or youth with special needs**: Diapers or soiled clothes should be changed by a family member or an adult staff member with another adult as a helper. There should be paperwork on file that specifically addresses this situation so that all parties are informed.

# Children and Youth With Special Needs

If you are working with children or youth who have special physical or mental needs, it is important to learn about those needs.

Ask your supervisor about the young person’s specific circumstances and the best ways to work with that child. It is important to have open communication with the parents and other caregivers so you are providing the right kind of care. Young people with special needs may have special considerations when it comes to pickup and dropoff, bathroom procedures, and equipment that may be necessary in the classroom.

Volunteers who work with groups of people with special needs should have specialized training in how to work best with these groups under the leadership of a trained staff member.