



THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH NURSERY

CHRISTIAN FORMATION
EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF TEXAS

2012

The Church Nursery

We are called as the church to receive, nurture and treasure each child as gift from God and to give high priority to the quality of planning for children and the preparation and support of those who minister with them. We are called to love, shelter, protect and defend children within our community, to nurture and support families in caring for their children, acting in the children's best interest.

The Diocese of Texas values and honors our children. We want our nurseries to be safe, clean and inviting to parents and children alike. This resource is designed to help you maintain your nursery in such a manner that our children and their parents feel confident and secure in using the facilities and that the children may have a positive and affirming experience in the church. Christian formation begins in the earliest stages of childhood. We owe the youngest members of our family the best we can offer.

Studies have shown that people look with more discerning eyes at childcare arrangements than perhaps they did in the past. Our nurseries are key entry points for many folks into the faith community and if we fall short in a newcomer's expectations of nursery facilities, we may well lose the family. We want to be sure that our childcare and facilities encourage adults to attend worship, events and classes rather than deter them from coming. An important ministry of adult Christians is to honor children and to provide a safe and loving environment where adults and children together relate to God, share in Christ's teaching and fellowship, seek and serve Christ in all persons, and are partners in building God's reign.

What does your nursery say to people about your congregation's values and care for children? Would you leave your child in your church nursery? What can we do to make sure our nurseries are secure, comfortable, clean and inviting? Remember that people come to church for a variety of reasons, and one of them is being part of a loving community. Does your nursery help parents and babies be recipients of this love?



Bishop Doyle welcoming the newly baptized at St. David's, Austin.

Photo by Rick Patrick

Written policies for your church

You might want to consider having a written policy for your church nursery. Clergy and vestry can be of help in this task. Define who can use the nursery, include the required ratio of children to adults, the need for *Safeguarding God's Children* training and other requirements, whether the nursery can be used for an event that is being held off-site, whether food can be served and how. Include scheduling procedures, cleaning procedures, etc. as part of the policy. Don't forget to include wellness issues, removing sick children from the nursery and providing for substitute nursery caregivers. Consider having detailed procedures for handling accidents and injuries. Include in the policies that nursery caregivers will not give children medicines.

Note that every church is required to follow the diocesan guidelines in *Safe Church Ministry, Diocesan Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse* for interviewing and hiring nursery attendants. If it will be necessary to use youth volunteers in the nursery, state that the church will provide childcare training for them, along with *Safeguarding God's Children* training. (Youth under age 15 most likely cannot accept the adult responsibility that comes with caring for children in a church nursery setting.) Most hospitals offer childcare classes, CPR or first aid training.

You might like to include nursery tours as part of newcomers' classes, baptismal instruction classes, or ministry to expectant parents.

The Space

Ideally the nursery should be located near the worship site in an easy-to-find space that will accommodate infants and toddlers safely. The location should be clearly identified and labeled on any site diagrams and at the doors. It may be valuable to have a person who is not familiar with your church provide input on how easy or difficult it was for them to find the nursery. The electrical outlets should have childproof covers, windows should be locked, and the doors should have windows, locks or a Dutch door configuration. Paint should be lead-free and the floor should be in good repair and clean. Washable rugs or carpets are a better choice than wall-to-wall carpeting or rugs that cannot be washed.

If you have the luxury of space, designate one

room or a portion of a room for beds and floor space for babies and crawlers and the other room or space for toddlers. Be sure that all spaces are in full view of the attendants. Leave plenty of floor space for children to play. Remember the clientele. Small people need small chairs and tables. A rocker for the attendant should usually be the only "adult-sized" furniture in the nursery. Have cubbies or hooks for diaper bags and keep them out of reach of inquisitive children. Put pictures on the wall at the height that a child can see either while being held or standing alone. Make certain the entry is protected so that children cannot leave the area unobserved.

Consider other needs:

- Can caregivers conveniently wash hands after diapering a child?
- Is there refrigeration available for children's beverages?
- Is there a convenient spot for signing in and out children?
- Is there a comfortable, private space for nursing mothers?

Have locked storage cabinets for nursery items. Post a list of items that should be in the nursery. Clearly label shelves and cabinets. Make a diagram of the room and furnishings to help keep the room in order.

Be mindful of the size of your room and the number of children and caregivers and furnishings it will comfortably hold. Generally, most rooms cannot accommodate more than 15 children.



A comfortable and well organized church nursery

Sanitizing/Cleaning Suggestions

It is important to remember that most of the users of the nursery are on the floor, therefore, the nursery should be the cleanest room in the whole church.

After every use of the nursery, wash the crib sheets in hot water with a small amount of bleach and dry them on hot setting. Wipe bed rails with a mixture of 1 part bleach to 10 parts warm water. Use this same mixture to clean toys, changing tables, etc. Use disposable changing pads on the changing tables and discard pad after every diaper change.

Regularly wash toys thoroughly with soapy water and dip in the above bleach solution. Air dry the toys. Check for broken parts and throw away any broken toy. Vacuum and/or mop floors after each use. At the end of the day, clean and sanitize bathrooms as well, and empty trash. Have a covered receptacle for used diapers.

Don't forget to clean any chairs, tables, swings, bouncy chairs, etc. that children sit in.

Caregivers should wash their hands before and after changing diapers, or any use of the rest room facilities and before and after handling any food.

Check in/out procedures

The size of your church and the number of children in the nursery will shape these procedures.

It is the responsibility of the parents to take their children to the nursery. To ensure the comfort and health of all the children, sick children should not be accepted in the nursery. If a child becomes sick while in the nursery, parents must be asked to take the child home. Parents are to complete a nursery registration form and leave it with the caregivers for the files. This registration form should include contact information, any allergies, special needs or situations.

Diaper bags, sippy cups and bottles should be labeled with child's name, phone number and parent's name. Stick-on name tags work well for this purpose. You might like to have a more permanent label arrangement for "regulars".

You might want to have nametags for each child.

Place a sign-in/out sheet or cards at the door to the nursery so that parents can fill in requested infor-

mation without having to enter the room. Make sure you know where the parents will be – in which class or where in church, so that you can find them quickly in case of an emergency if they are needed. If childcare will take place at the church for an off-site activity for the parents, special arrangements and policies must be in place. These policies will be written in consultation with the rector and vestry and will be a part of the nursery policy for your individual church.

Caregivers

The Diocese of Texas requires the following of all nursery attendants:

- Complete the three hour training, Safeguarding God's Children
- Complete the volunteer or employee application form
- Reference check
- Nationwide criminal and sex offender background check.
- Sign Acknowledgements and Code of Conduct forms
- All of the above forms are found in the Administrator's Manual for Diocesan Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse.
- Completed forms and background check results must be kept at the church in a locked file.
- The following policies apply to nursery workers: Two unrelated adults 21 years or older are required at all times.
- Nursery workers younger than 21 must work under the supervision of the adults described above.
- Nursery assistants between the ages of 15 and 21 should complete the Safeguarding training. Assistants 18 – 21 should also have a background check run.

The following ratios of adult to child must be observed:

Infants (ages 0-1)	1 adult to 3 infants
Toddlers (ages 1-2)	1 adult to 6 toddlers
Age 2- grade 8	1 adult to 8 children
9th – 12th grade	1 adult to 12 youth

Remember that at least 2 unrelated adults must always be present.

Follow the guidelines in Safe church training, Diocesan Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse and the Administrator's Manual for interviewing and hiring nursery attendants. Youth under 15 years of age most likely cannot accept the responsibility of caring for children in church nursery setting.

These policies are designed to make our churches safe places for our children and to provide a measure of safety for the adult caregivers.

Caregivers should be active, take initiative with children and interact with them. This is not the place to sit back and “watch” the children. Caregivers should be expected to model for the children kind and loving Christian behavior.

Caregivers should not come to work if they are sick.

Caregivers should not make or receive personal calls or visits while on duty, except in cases of emergency.

Caregivers will not give medicine to children.

It is a good idea to provide CPR and first aid training for your caregivers.

Diapering and Rest Room Policies

Diapering should be done in diapering stations in close proximity to other care providers. It is not appropriate for diapering to occur behind closed doors or in isolated areas. Never leave a baby unattended on a changing table. Caregivers must wash hands before and after diapering a child.

An adult caregiver must accompany all children age 2 through kindergarten to the rest room. If facilities are removed from the nursery, the caregiver

must check the bathroom to see if other adults are present before allowing the child to go in. If there is no stall in the rest room, the caregiver stands outside the door while the child uses the bathroom. If there are stalls, the child goes into the stall alone. The caregiver will assist the child only if necessary, in which case the stall door or the outer door shall remain ajar. The caregiver should not go into the rest room with the child and close the door, or into the stall and close the door. If the rest room is in the nursery with only one toilet, the caregiver accompanies children age 2 through kindergarten, assisting the child only if necessary but otherwise not going in the rest room with the child and leaving the door ajar. When there are special needs or extenuating circumstances, a specific policy must be formulated, approved by the rector and the parents of the child



Caring for God's children in our nurseries.

Fire safety

Have a diagrammed fire escape plan posted for all to see. Inform parents of fire evacuation procedures and the location of the meeting point.

Nursery Furnishings

Having a written policy in place regarding acquisition of items for the nursery saves you from potentially sticky situations involving people wanting to give the nursery used baby items such as toys, beds, changing tables, etc.

Make sure your nursery meets local code requirements. Electrical outlets should have childproof covers in place, doors should be easily secured to keep children in, but also facilitate a safe exit in an emergency. The door should contain safety glass so that people can see inside the room. Cribs must meet safety codes. Be sure that the mattresses fit the beds correctly and that slats are correctly spaced.

Age-appropriate toys that can be cleaned and sanitized are necessary in the church nursery. For older children, kitchen sets, workshop sets, dolls, puzzles, books, a childproof nativity set, blocks and musical instruments or tapes are good items. Nursery showers are a good way to get needed items. Meet with parents to compile a list of items and then publish the list along with an invitation to a party or in the bulletin.

For safety purposes, store toys on shelves or in open crates. Toy chests with lids can be very dangerous for young children.

It is a good idea not to allow children to bring toys to the nursery with the exception of “loveys.”

Caring for Children with Special Needs

Don't be afraid to ask straightforward questions regarding the special needs of a child. Determine if the special needs are so great that you cannot provide quality care to the child.

Ask what activities they enjoy, what activities should be avoided. Find out if there are any special equipment needs. Educate the caregivers about disabilities, and work with the parents. Plan for extra caregivers in order to give individualized attention to the special-needs child.



The nursery as a special place for children

Food and Drink in the Nursery

Many children have food allergies. Be sure you know of any children with such allergies in the nursery. (See section on check in/out procedures.) Do not have any food in the nursery containing peanuts, chocolate, nuts or strawberries. Regular Cheerios, Goldfish, Lucky Charms and lemonade are usually acceptable.

Ask parents for permission in advance of serving food. No outside food should be brought in except for bottles of milk/formula. Be sure that children's bottles are clearly labeled with child's name, the contents of the bottle and the time to give it to the child. If you do allow food to be brought in, make sure that children receive food and drink from their own bag. All bottles should be premixed and poured by the parents.

Health Care Policies

For the protection of all the children in the nursery, parents should be requested not to bring their child if he or she appears to be ill. You might consider the following symptoms as reasons for refusal of nursery care:

Fever, currently or within the previous 24 hours

Vomiting

Diarrhea

Persistent nasal drainage that is green or yellow in color

Common cold

Sore throat

Unexplained rash

Skin infections

Eye infections

Any symptom of childhood disease, such as scarlet fever, German measles, mumps or chicken pox.

If the child develops any of the above symptoms while in nursery care, your policy should state that they will be separated from the other children and the parents will be contacted to take the child home immediately. Your policy might include that if a child develops an infectious disease after being in the nursery, that the church should be informed so that other parents can be apprised of the situation.

Resources Available

The Diocesan Christian Formation Resource Library has the following resources available:

Diocese of Texas Safeguarding God's Children Policies

The Nursery Child in the Church, Seabury Press

The First Three Years, Mary Alice Gran

Your Nursery Handbook, Anne Gilbert

Teaching Preschoolers, Phoebe M. Anderson

Making Your Church More Inviting, Roy M.

Oswald

The Warm and Wonderful Church Nursery, Kim

Sikes and Lori Haynes Niles

The Safe and Caring Church Nursery, Jennifer

Root Wilger

The Guild of the Christ Child (P. O. Box 584, Lake Oswego, Oregon 97034)



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