



# **ELEVATE LEADERS**

**A handbook to help  
you be a great leader.**

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## WHY LEAD THE YOUTH

God can do incredible things in youth.

Do you believe that? We sure hope so. John 15:16 says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit...” The *you* are not only adults, but students too. We believe that God has chosen and appointed 6th-12th graders that He will bear fruit through. We believe that God wants to reach, save, disciple, and send youth into our middle schools and high schools. We believe they are smarter, stronger, and more passionate about Jesus than we give them credit for and we hope to serve alongside a great church and a better God to see them flourish.

We serve in student ministry because the relationships that we build with students help them in building and growing in relationships with God and others. Groups are SO important to students because they build a community in what can be an overwhelmingly large ministry. When students feel welcomed and included, they are more likely to engage in conversations that challenge and grow their faith. Having time with a smaller group of fellow students gives ALL of them a space to contribute to conversations. Groups allow leaders to contribute, care for, disciple, and guide students in their faith. That’s what this is about: Making disciples who will make disciples.

This is about life transformation and gospel proclamation. This is about so much more than another fun thing to do on a Wednesday night. This is about discipling young men and women. This is about knowing, loving, and obeying God better.

## **LEADING WELL**

Youth leaders are our strongest point of impact that we have with our students because they are the ones on ground level with students in groups and relationships with parents. Our leaders make a huge impact in the faith of our students by loving, encouraging, guiding, and supporting them.

### **QUALITIES OF A LEADER**

- Following Jesus
- Passionate about students + their relationships with Jesus
- A consistent voice in the lives of your students
- Leading a lifestyle that is committed to biblical standards
- Willing to learn names
- Trustworthy + reliable
- Responsible
- Relational
- Humble

### **EXPECTATIONS**

- Attend youth group every week
- Connect with your students regularly (outside of Wednesdays)
- Take ownership of group
- Be willing to walk through difficult issues with your students
- Guide conversations without lecturing
- Be available + interruptable
- Attend events for students
- Practice safe + healthy boundaries with students at all times
- Be in a community group (i.e. young adults)
- Attend West Side on Sundays

## **1. SET THE TONE**

We expect our leaders to be walking in a relationship with God at all times. We don't expect perfection in a walk of faith, but we do expect an eager + growing relationship with God. Your attitude, posture, vocabulary, + passion is contagious. Make sure you use that influence well.

## **2. DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS**

Invest time and effort in connecting with students inside and outside of church. Relationships take time. We highly encourage our leaders to commit to at least a year with their group. A good goal is to spend time with students 3-5x a year outside of church + connecting once a week.

## **3. LEAD DON'T LECTURE**

Students have a desire to be heard, understood, and cared for. Avoid taking over the conversation or lecturing. Actively listen. Ask questions that challenge our students to discover truth + practical application.

## **4. SAFETY IN BOUNDARIES**

As we build strong relationships with students, practicing healthy boundaries is critical to the safety and security of our leaders and their students.

- Physical boundaries with opposite sex (side hugs, high fives, avoid extended frontal hugs, etc.)
- Conversations via text, social media, or internet
  - o Be very careful with 1:1 interactions. Social media is a great tool for ministry, but it's also the downfall for many.
  - o Lead by example. Drinking or smoking on your feed is not leading well. Immodest clothing/posing is not leading well. Inappropriate language/content is not leading well.

## **5. EMPOWER THE PARENTS**

Building relationships with parents is almost as important as building relationships with students because parents hold the greatest impact in the life of a student. They are the primary disciple-maker in the home. Our goal is to partner with them in discipling their child.

- Reinforce the authority of parents
- Keep parents informed
- Utilize their knowledge of your students!

## **6. WALK THE WALK**

Talking the talk isn't good enough. As leaders, we are showing our students what it looks like to be a Christian. What will they think about the church if we don't show up? How will they interact with the Bible if we demonstrate that we don't engage with it?

The best way that we can model the ways that we live out our faith is by being with them in that. Show your students that your commitment to your faith is important in your daily and weekly tasks such as attending church, reading the Bible, and praying.

- Serve joyfully
- Be authentic
- Be in a group (i.e. young adults)
- Participate in healthy relationships
- Be above reproach

## **BEFORE SERVICE**

### **1. LEADER MEETING**

Each week, there is a brief leader meeting at 6:15pm. The purpose of these meetings are to calibrate our hearts for the evening. The youth pastor will discuss upcoming events, the sermon topic, and prayer. This is a chance to be encouraged and to breathe before stepping out.

### **2. BE CONSISTENT**

Our ministry thrives on leaders that consistently arrive on time eager to connect with students and get the evening started. We completely understand that life happens and there are occasions when being on time or present isn't possible. In that case, we just ask that you communicate early and clearly about your attendance with the youth pastor.

### **3. COME PREPARED**

Whether you are preaching, leading worship, announcing something, leading a game, or a small group leader, come prepared. Make sure to review the small group guide which will be sent out ahead of time.

## **DURING SERVICE**

### **1. EYES + EARS**

Youth leaders are the eyes and ears on the ground and being aware of the students surrounding us can make a huge impact on the trajectory of a student's night at Elevate. Our attention is on students.

- Leaders should not be sitting with other leaders only
- Leaders should not be clustered in the back
- Leaders are encouraged to sit with and worship next to students

## **2. SEE THE NEEDS**

Hop into any area of the programming that might need extra assistance or ask the youth pastor where there is a need to meet. Help may be needed in corralling rowdy students, welcoming students and parents, or something as simple as keeping the room tidy.

## **3. LOOK FOR STUDENTS WHO NEED EXTRA ATTENTION**

It is easy to hang out with students who are like you. It's also just as easy to forget the quieter students who sit by themselves in the corner.

- Look for those students and give them your attention
- We are here for the outcasts, loners, and hurting students
- Step into their lives to show them the love of Jesus

## **AFTER SERVICE**

### **1. HANG WITH STUDENTS**

Every minute that we get to spend time and build relationships with our students is crucial to the impact that we get to make in their lives.

- Hang with your students + their friends
- Follow up on group conversations
- Build relationships
- Try not to leave immediately

### **2. CONVERSE WITH PARENTS**

When students are being picked up is a great time to get to know parents, exchange phone numbers, or continue building a relationship.

Utilize this time to get to know them. We can learn so much about our students through relationships with their parents.



## **SUNDAYS**

### **1. GO TO CHURCH**

Youth leaders are Christians first and foremost. If you had to ever choose between serving on Wednesday and attending on Sunday; choose Sunday. The Bible is clear that we are to gather, worship, fellowship, and sit under the preaching of the Word weekly.

### **2. SIT TOGETHER**

Consider sitting in the “student section”. Located at the right corner of the worship center. Encourage students to sit with you (unless their parent prefers they sit together). There is something really special about watching a group of youth worshipping together, and it will testify to the church about what God is doing in our student ministry.

## GROUPS

What is the purpose of groups? Discipleship.

### **Group leaders are the bridge between the sermon and the student.**

Disciple them up, don't dumb it down. The goal is for students to learn. We won't censor big words, we will define them. We won't preach a sanitized gospel, but the gospel that has the power to save (Rm. 1:16).

In *Lead Them to Jesus*, Mike McGarry writes, "Discipleship takes place best through relationships." He continues, "At their best, small groups become a safe place to talk openly about sin, doubts, and struggles as students wrestle with their faith and grow into it."

Small groups is where names are learned, prayer requests are spoken, questions are asked + answered, and inside jokes are created.

#### **1. WHAT SHOULD MY GROUP LOOK LIKE?**

Everyone feels some type of way about the word structure. Some love it, some loathe it. Regardless, students need structure and groups will provide it for them. But that doesn't mean we are excommunicating spontaneity either. Relationships are best formed organically.

Have you ever heard of the phrase "controlled chaos"? Structured spontaneity is kind of like that. We will format our groups so that students know, for the most part, what to expect each week. This way we can spend our time and energy pressing into discipleship.

Every group is unique, so adapt. However, every group should have these things in common: fun, prayer, questions, and Scripture.

- **Fun** – Small groups can't be boring or too intense. Trust is a major prerequisite for transformation. In order to develop trust, you have to earn it with your students. It's the old adage: People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Have fun with your students and build relational equity.
- **Prayer** – We are a praying people. Normalize praying together. That being said, it can be a vulnerable + scary thing, so use your discernment with challenging students to pray.
  - Tip: Have both of the students sitting beside you pray.
- **Questions** – Because our philosophy is to disciple them up, not dumb it down, there are going to be questions. You are not supposed to be the expert so don't worry about having all of the answers. If you don't know something, be honest and learn with them. What a great opportunity to demonstrate humility and a curiosity to learn.
- **Scripture** – The Bible is our first + final authority. Quote it often.

## 2. WHAT DO WE TALK ABOUT?

Each week, we will send out a groups guide, along with the order of service for the evening. The guide will assist you in leading your group. We don't want clones but there should be some uniformity. Ask the questions, read the verses, lead the group according to the big idea, and send them out with the challenge.

### Group Guide

**BIG IDEA:** Main point or the primary takeaway from the sermon.

**ASK:** Questions to ask during small group.

**READ:** Complimentary Scripture/quotes to read in small group.

**CHALLENGE:** A suggested challenge to send the students home with.

**GEN Z IS PLAGUED WITH A DISEASE CALLED SIN AND IT'S TERMINAL. THIS ISN'T EXCLUSIVE TO 6-12TH GRADERS BUT GEN Z IS LESS LIKELY THAN ANY OTHER GENERATION TO GET THE ANTIDOTE: THE GOSPEL. ROMANS 1:16 TESTIFIES THAT "THE GOSPEL IS THE POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATION". DO YOU BELIEVE THAT? TOO OFTEN, STUDENTS GET A WATERED DOWN, TAINTED, OR ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT GOSPEL TREATMENT. LET THE GOSPEL DO YOU WHAT IT HAS THE POWER TO DO - NAMELY, SAVE SINNERS AND SET THEM APART FOR GOD'S GLORY AND THEIR JOY. WE WANT - NO, WE NEED - TO GIVE THE STUDENTS THE RAW, UNFILTERED, 100 PROOF GOSPEL AND IF THE CHURCH ISN'T HANDING IT OUT WITH URGENCY, WHO WILL?**

## **POLICIES + PROCEDURES**

At West Side Community Church, we take our responsibility to care for students very seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which youth can grow in relationship with Jesus Christ.

The following pages of this handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guidelines for volunteers and staff members providing services to youth from 6th through 12th grades at Elevate Student Ministries. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for students, protecting them, you, and the mission of West Side.

Because we desire to protect students involved in our ministries, all youth leaders must undergo an onboarding process, which includes passing a background check, in order to serve.

Thank you for leading, loving and protecting our students.

### **MEDICATION**

Do not administer medication of any kind to any student while serving in ministry programs, including 'over the counter' drugs. For certain trips or activities (i.e., mission trips, beach/ski retreats), Sample Church will bring a medical professional that will dispense appropriate medications consistent with other policies and signed parent permission forms.

## **DIGITAL COMMUNICATION**

All communication with students must be above reproach and indicative of healthy boundaries. The content of any communication should be readily available to share with the youth pastor or a parent.

Avoid texting before 6am or after 11pm.

Do not share photos and/or videos of a sexual or suggestive nature.

Avoid discussion of ANY sexual topic via texts, regardless of gender.

## **VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Verbal interaction with students should be positive and uplifting. All verbal interaction should be encouraging, constructive, and mindful of our mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of students.

To this end, do not talk to students in a way that is or could be construed as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Do not swear in the presence of students.

In general, verbal interaction should occur in a location where others may observe what is happening. At no time should a student and adult disappear behind a closed door, or interact in an area which cannot be seen by others.

## **PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA**

As a ministry leader, maintain a high moral standard in your social media presence. Inappropriate social media content may be a basis for suspension from participation in student ministry at West Side Community Church. Please be cautious about the content of the posts on your personal social media. Please ensure that photos or videos posted on social media reflect Elevate Student Ministries guidelines related to alcohol, tobacco and modesty (dress, posture, and content).

Do not post inappropriate content, or like/comment on inappropriate posts. When in doubt, treat a post as inappropriate.

## **PHYSICAL CONTACT**

Appropriate touch is needed and encouraged, but it is vital that staff members and volunteer leaders do not blur or cross the lines. In light of this, the following guidelines should be observed:

- Physical contact in any form should be above reproach, for the benefit of the student, and never based upon your emotional needs.
- Your personal behavior must foster trust at all times.
- Pat a hand, shoulder or back in an encouraging manner.
- Side hugs: in public view and kept brief. When hugging someone of the opposite gender, hugs should be limited to side-hugs.
- Look for opportunities to give plenty of “high fives” and “fist bumps”, unless this makes a student feel uncomfortable.
- Shake hands, or put an arm around the student’s shoulder, briefly.

Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant student, except in cases of necessary restraint for the protection of the child or others.

Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of others. It is much less likely that touch will be misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.

AVOID the following interactions:

- A sexual relationship with a student is never acceptable.
- Never touch a student in the breasts, buttocks, or genitals.
- No sitting on laps.
- Never touch in a manner that may be construed as sexual.
- Never kiss a student, or give (or receive) a massage.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for students. In order to maintain safety and security for all parties, we ask that you adhere to the following ranking system (from most to least appropriate) when transporting students:

- 2+ leaders : 2+ students
- 2+ leaders : 1 student
- 1 leader : 2+ students
- 1 leader : 1 student (with parental and pastoral approval)

It is never appropriate to travel alone with a student of the opposite sex.



## **CLOTHING**

Please dress in appropriate attire. Do not wear anything that may be portrayed as sexually provocative. Nor should you wear clothing that is too tight, too short, or too revealing.

Appropriate undergarments must always be worn.

Do not wear clothing that has low necklines or that show midriff.

Men must not wear swimsuits that are too short or too tight and women must not wear swimsuits that are too revealing or too tight.

## **ALCOHOL + TOBACCO**

The use or possession of alcohol or any tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of students or their parents, or during any Elevate Student Ministries activities or programs, whether on campus or away is strictly prohibited. *Do not participate in the consumption of alcohol or tobacco while with students.*

West Side Community Church is an alcohol and tobacco-free facility.

## **MARIJUANA + OTHER DRUGS**

The use, possession, or being under the influence of marijuana or any illegal drugs is strictly prohibited and will result in immediate suspension from serving in Elevate Student Ministries.

## **BOUNDARIES + ABUSE**

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

There may be times when a student asks you to keep something a secret. While it is very tempting to promise them that, you can never ensure absolute confidentiality.

One reason, among many others, is because the student may reveal some kind of abuse that you are obligated to report to the youth pastor and law enforcement.

In this situation, you should reply: “I promise to not share anything if I don’t have to. However, I can’t promise you absolute confidentiality.”

Our heart is to protect the reputation and privacy of the individuals but that may mean we have to communicate with outside parties (parents, law enforcement, or ministry staff).

### **CHILD PROTECTION**

Elevate Student Ministries supports and maintains a zero tolerance policy concerning child abuse and neglect. It is a violation of Michigan law for any volunteer or staff member to physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect any child participating in our student ministry.

## **ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES**

Elevate Student Ministries maintains the highest standards in order to protect both the volunteers and students in our ministry. Anyone working with children or students at West Side Community Church is subject to the supervision and evaluation of the ministry staff and must follow these guidelines. West Side Community Church staff reserves the right to dismiss volunteers who fail to follow the policies and guidelines.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION**

Any person accused of committing any act considered by the church to be harmful to a student will be immediately suspended from participation in ministry to youth. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement, Child Protective agencies, or the Church.

Any person found to have violated this policy may be prohibited from future participation in all activities and programming involving minors. If the person is an employee, such conduct may result in termination of employment.

Failure to report a policy violation is grounds for termination of an employee. Volunteers who fail to report a policy violation may be restricted from participation in any future activities involving minors at Elevate Student Ministries.

Staff members and volunteer leaders should discuss immediately with their supervisor any inappropriate action or breaking of this policy and will seek counsel from the church leadership and attorney, if needed.

## **REPORTING SUSPICIOUS/INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS**

We are committed to protecting the students in this ministry from any form of abuse. Elevate Student Ministries has a Zero-Tolerance Policy that prohibits any act of sexual, emotional or physical abuse. This zero-tolerance policy requires all West Side employees and volunteer leaders (those who work directly with students) to immediately report any occurrence (or suspected occurrence) of child abuse to a member of our staff. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse or neglect will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to Child Protective Services or criminal law enforcement.

Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible that a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to groom a child for sexual abuse. Please report 'grooming' behavior, policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to an immediate supervisor, such that the church may take appropriate action to safeguard children in the program.

While not required by state law, please report all *suspicions* of child abuse or neglect (or any inappropriate or 'grooming' behaviors) to the youth pastor. This request is intended to assist the church in properly protecting children involved in Elevate Student Ministries.

**When in doubt, report.**

# **POLICIES + PROCEDURES**

## **STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND AGREEMENT**

*This page is to be signed, detached, and delivered.*

Staff members and volunteer leaders are required to read and understand this student safety policy. Additionally, each staff member and volunteer leader must execute an acknowledgment form that this policy has been read, understood, and will be followed. Staff members and volunteer leaders who fail to adhere to this policy may be asked to step down from their role.

I have received and read a copy of Elevate Student Ministries Policies and Procedures on the date listed below, and I understand the importance of the matters set forth herein. I understand and agree to abide by these policies during my service at West Side Community Church.

I understand that these policies may be modified or eliminated at any time by West Side Community Church.

While, ideally, I will serve in this ministry for the agreed term, I understand that I may choose to end this relationship at any time. If possible, I will provide two weeks' notice to the youth pastor.

I further acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this manual in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between West Side Community Church and me. If I am applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no compensation for hours worked.

Finally, I understand that it is my responsibility to review new guidelines that are created and distributed.

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Volunteer's name (please print)

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Volunteer's signature

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Date