

2023 VGBC Youth Volunteer Handbook



A handbook to help outline serving with Wednesday Night Youth Group at VGBC.

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Dear Volunteer,

Thank you so much for being willing to use your gifts, talents, and time to serve young people here at VGBC. You are going to make such a big difference in the lives of these students!

Think back to your high school years. No like actually..... stop right now and think back to those years. I will wait..... Did you think back to those years? Great! Let's continue.

Whether you remember it or not, those years between 7th – 12th grade were so formative for you as you became an adult. During those years, your body changes, your brain develops, your tastes change, and you start the steps of becoming the person you will be once you are all grown up. As you think back, you probably thought of several things. 1. You might have immediately thought of something during those years that hurt you. 2. You probably thought about the friends you spent the most time with. 3. You probably also thought about someone who spoke into your life. And if you did not have number 3, that sticks with you just as much.

Our goal in Youth Ministry is not to “teach Jesus”; our goal is to build relationships. God structured all human society into the relationships we have--family relationships, social relationships, and church relationships. God was not unaware of what he was proclaiming when he called his disciples *his friends* (John 15:15). The goal of our youth ministry here at VGBC is to build relationships. Without relationship, no life-changing conversation can take place. You are not here to know all the answers or to quote verses. You are here to love others, which is the second of the most important commandments according to Jesus (Matthew 22:39).

My prayer is that you will partner with me in touching the lives of others by our willingness to love. In the pages to come there will be some helpful information on how to reach students and some resources that can help. But the best advice I can give you is to show love for students like you either had in high school or wished you had experienced. We are called to love; let's do it well!

I am so thankful that you are joining me in this ministry to love students well. But know that I will also endeavor to love you all well, which is why I've enclosed my personal contact information. We are undertaking this journey as a team, and I am available for whatever victory, question, or challenge that we may face together.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brandon Anderson".

In Him,
Brandon Anderson
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In the Beginning. . .

As You Begin

As we start this process together, it is important to answer the question, “What is Youth Ministry?” In short, Youth Ministry is intentionally seeking to reach young people (7th-12th) for Jesus. Everything we do will be to point this specific demographic towards a God who loves them. But, as mentioned in the welcome letter, our goal is not to simply teach. Look at the definition again. Our goal is to “reach young people for Jesus.” There are several key elements of Youth Ministry that need to be in place to reach that end goal.

1. **The teaching of the Word of God:** Scripture is the revelation from God to us outlining His plan for redemption. It is the specialized revelation of a Savior who loves us given through the writings of those who loved Him and preserved the Scriptures for us. We will be teaching the Word of God, but that is not a stand-alone goal.
2. **Activities:** Though this will not be the focus, activities are important. Activities allow for opportunities to laugh together, spend time together, and learn to trust each other. Whether it be a game night or a group hike, activities are a part of our ministry and contribute to the goal.
3. **Overnight trips:** Trips are great opportunities to not only have dedicated time to build relationships, but also to dive deep into knowing God.
4. **Service opportunities:** Not only do we want to serve our students, but we want to encourage them to serve others. Whether it be a local service project or a mission trip, Jesus came to serve, and we want our students to be more like Jesus.

None of these by themselves is what will accomplish the goal to reach young people for Jesus, but they are part of the bigger picture of how to do that. Now individually, it is important for you to recognize what to focus on in your own life to reach the goal of Youth Ministry.

1. **Seek to know God:** How can we point our students to a God if we do not seek to know Him ourselves? Our personal relationship with Jesus is essential in pointing people to Him.
2. **Seek to develop meaningful relationships with students:** People who laugh together cry together better. Even Jesus focused on the relationship He had with His disciples. YOUR FOCUS IN BEING IN THE YOUTH MINISTRY IS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS. I cannot express this enough. Being involved in the events listed above can help to build relationships, but there is more to it than that. I will have a section later that outlines building relationships with students.
3. **Seek to model Christlikeness:** As leaders, we are mirrors pointing to who God is. Whether it is fair or not, how we interact with students will impact their views of God. The way we live our lives matters.

Now for the technical stuff. Before you begin, we do need to take care of some technical details. Over the coming days, you will receive some very important emails:

1. A background check

- a. This step helps us protect our students. It is not only church policy, but also an important practice. Even if you have a background check with another organization, we require that you also have one with VGBC, which will be updated every 2 years.

2. Sexual Abuse Prevention Training

- a. This is a heavy training that takes about an hour. Even if you have done training with another organization, we require that you do this training and pass the quiz to serve within the Youth Ministry.
- b. The purpose of this training is to help protect those who are otherwise vulnerable by recognizing the signs of abuse. We serve a God who loves justice, and this is one step we can take to help protect our students.

Okay, you did it; you have read the *Before You Begin* section. So now what? Well, now that we have talked about the goal of our ministry, and the preparation steps that I ask for, let's look at what the expectations are for working with the Youth Ministry.

Expectations

I will warn you now, I expect a lot. I am asking for a commitment, and fulfillment of that commitment, to serve in our Youth Ministry. Your heartfelt commitment is important because we are seeking to reach young people for Jesus. So here are some ways that we can do that well and what that means for you.

1. **Consistency:** Few traits are more impactful for students than consistency. Knowing that they are going to see you, and that you are present in their lives makes a world of difference in their trust of you. I know that life can happen; these expectations are an "in general" sense. I know that emergencies happen, and I will not be a dictator about this.
 - a. I expect that you regularly attend Sunday morning services at VGBC. We are part of a body, not a stand-alone ministry. Per our church policy you also must be attending VGBC for 6 months to serve with minors.
 - b. I expect that you do not miss Wednesday nights. As I said, I know life happens, and there will be nights that I schedule to help give you all a break, but overall, I expect that you will be at Youth Group.
 - c. Whatever activities you are able to come to, please come. I know we will start to do more, and you have other schedules outside of this ministry, but whether it be the activities, or service projects, your attendance and participation are key.
2. **Dependability:** We are here to serve the students, not hang out with other adults. I need you to be mentally present when we are at Youth events:
 - a. Do not be on your phone. Social media and articles can wait. We are here to focus on the students and to listen to them. Yes, in a family emergency answer the phone or a text. But please be wise on when you use your phone.

- b. We are not there to talk to the other volunteers. Yes, the relationship we have with each other is important, but we can always talk to each other later. While we are at Youth Group, we are there to be with students. During Youth Group, please plan on sitting with students, and after Youth Group, please plan on talking to students. Questions for me are best asked at another time with a phone call or after students leave.
- c. I also need your help to be my eyes and ears. I cannot see everything. I need your help to see what is happening and help to ensure several things:
 - i. Make sure no students slip through the cracks. EVERY STUDENT should hear their name from an adult who cares about them EVERY WEEK. I cannot do that by myself. This also helps incorporate students who are on the fringe into the group as a whole.
 - ii. Limit any distractions while there is teaching. It is distracting when I call out cell phone use or side conversations from students from the front. I will need your help to see that and address it.
 - iii. The safety of all students and volunteers is very important. We will need to be vigilant that horse play does not get taken too far, or that students don't pair off in areas where they should not. At the end of the day, safety is one of our top priorities.

3. **Abuse situations:**

- a. Lord willing, this will not come up. But I want to clearly outline my expectations on this in writing. We take all abuse very seriously. Whether it be sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, we do not downplay abuse. Youth Group is no place to take abuse lightly. Because of that, if there are signs of abuse, I want to be made aware. I know that in some cases it is appropriate to keep some things a secret, but I will ask you to use wisdom in that. If there is any claim of abuse specifically involving Youth workers or a Youth activity, I must be informed.
- b. When it comes to sexual abuse, WE WILL REPORT TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES. As you will be made aware in the Sexual Abuse Prevention Training, predators are seeking to put themselves in a trusted position. It is not for us to judge the truth of a claim, so even if the claim is against me, I expect you to report it to the authorities. We as volunteers need to be above reproach where an accusation cannot stand. Below under "Official Rules" I outline ways to help ensure this.
- c. NEVER promise that you will keep a secret. If a student ever says they want to tell you something but you have to keep it a secret, never say that you will not tell anyone. Tell them you love them and that you are a safe person to tell, but you may need to tell someone who can help.
- d. If you are not sure how to handle a situation, the first step is to come and talk to me. Even if it is a situation where you do not use names initially, we can talk through the next steps together. If it is something where you cannot come to me (ex., A claim against me), you can approach any of the other VGBC ministers about the situation. If the claim has to do with the safety of a student, do not hesitate to get the local authorities involved, but typically talk to me first.

4. Official Rules as a Volunteer

- a. No dating students. As a volunteer, it is expected that you do not date any students in the Youth Ministry.
- b. Do not be alone with a student. Always ensure that you are around other adults or other students. If you find yourself in a situation where you are alone with a student for whatever reason, seek to get into a public place ASAP.
 - i. If you are getting together with a student 1 on 1,
 - 1. It should always be women with women and men with men. If a student of the opposite gender reaches out to you asking to speak, first direct them towards someone of their gender who they can speak to. Sometimes, however, students do not trust individuals of their gender, in which case it is possible you can meet with someone of the opposite gender but several steps must be made first:
 - a. It must be initiated by the student.
 - b. You must receive permission from the student's parents or guardians.
 - c. You must bring another adult with you to the meeting. They do not have to be "present at the meeting," but they should be in the location with you.
 - d. I must be made aware of the situation. In the case that I am the one the student is asking to meet with, I will be making Pastor Chris aware.
 - 2. It should also be in a public place: restaurant, coffee shop, etc.
 - ii. Handling car situations with students
 - 1. There are going to be times where a student needs a ride and being in the car alone with the student is inevitable. Here are some guidelines to follow for students in our ministry.
 - a. Never be alone in the car with a student of the opposite gender. Barring a lifesaving emergency, this is a no go, ever.
 - b. Receive permission from the parent or guardians.
 - c. Do not stop and talk in the car; go directly to the location (Youth activity, coffee shop, etc.).
- c. Communicating with students
 - i. I encourage you to communicate with students. The best way to do that is by using your cell phone. Whether it be texts (SMS) or phone calls, there is a kept record of those communications in the case of an accusation.
 - ii. Types of communication to avoid
 - 1. As a best practice I do not typically recommend that you follow students on Instagram or Facebook. However, always let them friend or follow you first. Specifically, do not Direct Message students with these platforms.



2. Avoid email, unless it is a domain email (ie., @vgbc.org). Email messages can be deleted without record of what was said. However, this is the best alternative to Cell Phone use.
- iii. Absolutely do not communicate using
 1. Snapchat. Do not friend students on Snapchat.
 - a. Exceptions to this rule, family members, family friends with parent permission, and I must be made aware.
 2. What's App, or any other internet messaging app.

Important Info and FAQ'S



Obviously, working with people who are a different age than you is not always natural. However, you have a secret weapon. In fact, you are showing it right now. The most powerful tool at your disposal is not being “cool” or “in the know” or being able to “relate”: your biggest, most powerful tool is willingness. The fact that you are present speaks volumes to students. Frankly, they do not care if you speak the language or wear the right clothes. What students care about is being cared for. Your being willing to be there is what starts the process of changing lives.

Let me give you an example that many of you have seen. One of the people I know firsthand who has made a dramatic difference in the lives of students is not someone who is described as cool. But time and time again I hear that this individual has impacted so many lives. He is Al Walmsley! Mollie is always mentioned with him as someone who has changed lives, but she is cool so she is not great for this example! But the reason Al has made such a big difference is because of his love for people. We as people are able to sense genuine care from others. If you are willing to love students, it doesn't matter if you think they will like you, you will make a difference.

Now with that being said, I will also add some tips for the times. I will list some phrases that have changed meaning over time, and some of the words that Gen Z has made up. But the key to building relationships is love. You do not have to know what they are saying, you just have to care enough to listen. You do not have to play the games, watch the movies, or know the shows; but if you are willing to listen to the interests of others, it speaks volumes.

First things first. **NONE OF OUR STUDENTS ARE MILLENNIALS.** The last Millennials graduated from High School in about 2017. I am a Millennial, but I am a very young Millennial. Our students are Gen Z. Books you have read on “reaching the next generation” but were written for Millennials no longer apply like they did. Whether you like it or not, Millennials are adults now, and we are working with Gen Z. Also, Gen Z kids are not being born anymore. Let that one sink in. The last of Gen Z was born roughly around 2018-2020. Also keep in mind that none of our students were alive for 9/11, and all of them were in school in 2020 and COVID. As you may know, just as 9/11 changed the world, so did our response to COVID.

Gen Z dictionary: This is not an exhaustive list, and these terms are subject to change.

Bet	I can do the thing you just hinted that I can't
Cap	What you just said is NOT true
No Cap	What I just said IS true
Sus	Something that is probably not how it appears to be; from SUSpicious
Slay	Equivalent to awesome or cool
L	Meaning to lose at something; "take that L" i.e. "take that loss"
Slaps	Something that is exceptional; i.e. "pizza slaps"
G.O.A.T.	Greatest Of All Time
Thick	Just avoid this one...it has been sexualized
Cringe	Something that is worthy of cringing; a dislike for something

The most important thing to keep in mind is that language changes. Words can mean something different at different times. If a student tells you that a term means something not great, it is best to take their word for it. Funny example. My mom had an Uncle Richard who also named his son Richard. Uncle Richard as he was growing up went by "Dick." I remember while visiting them in South Carolina one time that it was joked about by someone of an older generation that we could refer to Uncle Richard as "Big Dick," and Cousin Richard as "Little Dick." As you sit here and hear that, you can imagine how they took it. Uncle Dick thought it was clever, and Cousin Dick recognized why it was not totally appropriate. All that being said, language changes, and we need to be vigilant to recognize that.

Mental Health Discussion:

Another big topic in our community over the past few years has been the issue of mental health, specifically in regards to our abnormally high teen suicide rate in El Paso County. D20, where many of our students are, has been disproportionately impacted by this issue. As you interact with students who are battling mental health challenges there are a few things to keep in mind.

1. Mental Health can be a real battle for people. Just because you have not experienced it, or because you cannot see it like a broken arm, does not mean that there are not real elements that can contribute to these challenges for people. We are in a broken world, and our mental faculties are just as impacted by that as our physical bodies.
 - a. The answer to mental health challenges is not as simple as having more faith or praying more. That is in line with the health and wealth prosperity gospel, and we do not adhere to that because it is wrong.
2. We do not take discussion of suicide lightly. If a student mentions to you that they are battling suicidal thoughts, do not brush it under the rug. Get me involved, and we will take steps to help moving forward. NEVER assume it is just for attention.
3. Many of our students have friends who have killed themselves or are friends of friends. As leaders sometimes the best thing that we can do in these challenging life situations is to listen and pray.

4. Resources: These are good places to start.
 - a. Safe 2 tell: <https://safe2tell.org/>
 - b. Nami: <https://www.namiep.org/resources>
 - c. If you are working with a student battling these things, let's have a conversation about it and see how we can best support them.

Like I said, we take mental health very seriously. At some point soon, I would like for us to also do training in "Mental Health First Aid." This will not be a required course for all volunteers, but highly recommended.

Scandalous!

Modesty:

What is modesty? I assume you immediately thought of how women in particular dress. I would argue no, that is not correct. Modesty is a posture of the heart where we do not draw undue attention to ourselves. The church culturally and historically has picked specific elements of modesty to focus on, and that will not be what our Youth Ministry is defined by. Here are some points to remember for this discussion

1. Modesty is not a gendered issue. Both men and women need to display modesty and not draw undue attention to self.
2. Modesty is not about clothing. Modesty is a posture of the heart. Clothing can reflect modesty, but is not the focal of modesty.
3. No individual is responsible for the sin of others. We will never--NEVER--tell a young lady that she needs to be modest so that men do not sin. That is not the reason at all, especially Biblically. All people should be modest due to our relationship and reflection of Jesus, not because of the sin of others.

Because of these elements mentioned as of right now, there is not a list of "set standards" for modesty; instead, we will interact with this per the relationships that we have. If someone you know is not interacting modestly, it is appropriate to pull them aside and outline why you believe that. If there is an issue that continues, please get me involved. However, here are some things to keep in mind when situations do arise.

1. Clothing modesty is cultural, and we do need to be appropriate to Colorado culture, but also while recognizing something that may not have been modest historically may not be considered immodest now.
2. We will again NEVER kick out a student, especially a visitor, because of how they are dressed (leaving some room for extreme situations). Jesus is looking for a change of heart, not a change of clothes, and we will do the same.
3. We will hold all individuals to the same standards of modesty, not just the women.

Discipline:

I should be made aware of any major behavior issues. If there is a need for there to be some kind of discipline whether for normal Youth Group or overnight trips, there is a simple rule:

Brandon is the bad guy.

I do not want you as a volunteer making the decisions on major disciplinary action to preserve the relationships that you have. This obviously does not exclude you from stepping in when necessary, but I will be the one that tells a student, and their parents, that they are being sent home from camp, for example.

The End. . .

Conclusion

You did it! You made it through. Now just a couple more paragraphs and you can breathe! Again, I just want to say thank you for being willing to serve the students here at VGBC! Your willingness to serve will change lives for the Gospel. Secondly, you just read a lot of information in a short amount of time. Remember that we are a team, and if at any point you have a question, please come and talk to me. This is by no means any kind of exhaustive list of what may come up in Youth Ministry--just wait until you have students whose friends are practicing witchcraft! Let's keep the dialogue open. Finally, let's pray for our students. Let's pray that their love for Jesus grows and that they would abide in Him (John 15:4). Let's pray for fruit in our ministry together, that even our students would start to dramatically reach others for Jesus!

We serve a faithful God. It is not our work or effort that will change the lives of these students. It is the power of the Holy Spirit living through us. As Paul tells us in Romans 8:9-11 (Bold added):

"But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed **the Spirit of God dwells in you**. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. ¹¹ **But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.**