

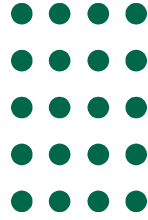


Leader Handbook

Modified May 2026

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OUR WHY:

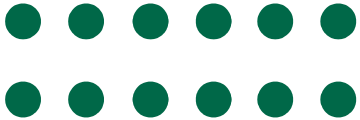
We exist to encourage and equip students on their discipleship journey—connecting them to Jesus, to one another, and to caring, committed adults.

Students are seeking answers to these existential questions:

1. *Who am I? (Identity)*
2. *Where do I fit in? (Belonging)*
3. *Do I matter? (Purpose)*

As they ponder these questions, we desire that they seek and find answers in the faith community of Grace Students. Grace Students exists because we believe:

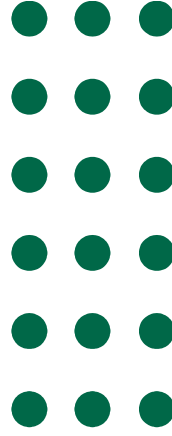
1. *Every student is a masterpiece, created for a lifelong, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ and uniquely equipped to contribute to His kingdom. (Ephesians 2:10)*
2. *All Christ-followers—regardless of age—are a part of the family of God and find their truest identity in Christ. (1 Timothy 4:12)*
3. *The local church is part of God’s “Plan A” to bring redemption and hope to the world, and to this end, we aim to empower students to be ambassadors of redemption and hope to those around them. (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)*



OUR WIN:

We win when a student takes a step closer to Jesus.

We say “takes a step” for a reason: there’s no finish line in spiritual growth. Faith development is a life-long journey, and no two paths are identical. The evidence of students taking such steps is revealed by the fruits of the Spirit manifesting in their lives. Through teaching, experiences, and small group processing designed around biblical literacy, spiritual disciplines, and core practices patterned on the life and mission of Christ, our students are provided ample opportunity to go deeper with and draw nearer to Jesus.

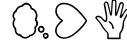


Our desire is that, by the time they graduate from Grace Students, our students will

- Understand and be able to articulate the gospel and the grand narrative of Scripture.
- Adopt and cultivate a personal relationship with Jesus.
- Be exposed to and experience growth in all 12 Practices of the Way of Discipleship.

Belief

Disciples of Jesus embrace the core convictions of Christianity, find assurance in God's love, and hold firm to the redemptive work of Christ.



- Understand the core convictions of Christianity.*
- Desire a life-transforming relationship with Jesus and a place in His kingdom mission.*
- Repent and commit their lives to Jesus and begin the journey of following Him.*

Surrender & Trust

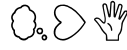
Disciples of Jesus give control of their lives over to God, seeking to consistently live out His plans and desires for them.



- Recognize that living in submission to God through Jesus is the best possible life, even amidst doubts, questions, and trials.*
- Desire to be fully devoted to Jesus, confident in their identity as one of God's beloved children.*
- Demonstrate obedience to Jesus in every aspect of their lives.*

Communing with God

Disciples of Jesus actively seek to “be” with God, recognizing Him as their source of love, wisdom, strength, sustenance, and identity.



- Recognize the value of creating space to connect with God.*
- Desire closeness with God and consistently experience the peace of His presence.*
- Deliberately set aside time to be with God through contemplative spiritual disciplines.*

Studying the Bible

Disciples of Jesus prioritize studying the scriptures and engaging in sound biblical teaching to transform their lives.



- Acknowledge the necessity of an understanding of sound biblical principles, historical context, and the character of God.*
- Experience passion to encounter God through His inspired and authoritative word.*
- Engage the Bible personally and align their lives to its teachings.*

Self-Denial

Disciples of Jesus say “no” to selfish desires and prioritize the values and virtues of the Kingdom of God.

- 💭 *Become aware of weaknesses and distractions that prevent focusing on God's kingdom purposes.*
- 💖 *Experience peace through pursuing God's kingdom purposes instead of self-oriented desires.*
- 👉 *Daily choose to say “no” to selfish desires to live to cultivate the fruits of the Spirit.*

Moral Integrity

Disciples of Jesus reject the corruption of sin and reflect the character of Christ to the world as image bearers of God.

- 💭 *Understand the Bible's principles and values to discern the Spirit's leading even in complex situations.*
- 💖 *Discover joy in obedience and doing the right thing.*
- 👉 *Choose to obey and embody God's moral vision.*

Spiritual Community

Disciples of Jesus are committed to their spiritual friendships, building real relationships that encourage and strengthen one another, and working towards unity with other believers through the local Church.

- 💭 *Recognize the necessity of participation in a spiritual community found through a local church.*
- 💖 *Yearn for relationships that point them to Jesus and inspire their best selves while experiencing loss and negative impact when they don't get to be with those people regularly.*
- 👉 *Commit to pursuing intentional relationships with other Christ-followers.*

Pursuing the Call of God

Disciples of Jesus listen to the voice of God's spirit to discern their unique, God-given passions and giftings and follow God's call to help heal the broken places of the world.

- 💭 *Understand that God uses their gifts, talents, passions, personality, and experiences to help repair the broken places of the world.*
- 💖 *Experience joy and satisfaction as they live out God's unique call on their lives.*
- 👉 *Align their lives and resources in pursuit of God's mission.*



Justice & Mercy

Disciples of Jesus show compassion to the poor, vulnerable, wronged, and marginalized of our world by freely sharing God's abundance, standing against systems of oppression, and making intentional changes in their lives to bring about justice.

-  *Assess the nature of injustice both episodically and systemically and its impact locally, nationally, and internationally.*
-  *Experience a sense of righteous anger that compels them to serve and give in areas of injustice.*
-  *Participate in consistent, sacrificial service and generosity to combat injustice.*

Living Generously

Disciples of Jesus embrace a spirit of generosity with their resources, live with contentment, and avoid materialism to dedicate more of what God has blessed them with to His purposes in the world.

-  *Move from a mindset of materialism to one of stewardship, recognizing what they have is a blessing from God to be used to advance the priorities of His kingdom.*
-  *Experience peace and contentment, trusting in God's provision as they give from a grateful heart.*
-  *Consistently give cheerfully, depending on God for their needs, their future, and their sense of security, provision, and comfort.*

Loving Others Well

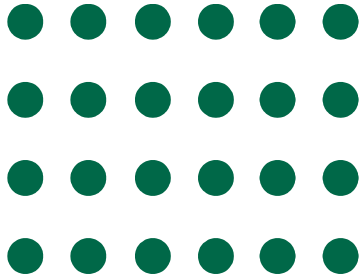
Disciples of Jesus strive to love others as God loves them, extending compassion, forgiveness, or correction, compelled by a desire for healing and wholeness.

-  *Recognize that God loves all people unconditionally and that they are commanded to love others as they love themselves.*
-  *Genuinely desire to step into others' lives with love and care.*
-  *Regularly demonstrate God's love by offering His kindness, compassion, guidance, and forgiveness to everyone.*

Leading Others to Jesus

Disciples of Jesus are committed to sharing the gospel with others through words and actions, praying for the lost and broken, and asking the Spirit to provide opportunities to invite others to become disciples as well.

-  *Recognize their call and responsibility to share and demonstrate what Jesus has done in their own lives.*
-  *Experience a deep compassion and conviction for others to be transformed by Jesus.*
-  *Share and model the love of Jesus to those who do not yet follow Him, attuned to the Spirit's leading as they invite others to experience that transformation.*



OUR WAY:

Through engaging teaching and worship, small group interaction, special events and retreats, and short-term missions trips, we seek to foster environments, experiences, and relationships which help students take their next step closer to Jesus.

Large Group Gatherings

Large group gatherings are designed to help students connect with Jesus through worship, biblical teaching, and creative activities and experiences.

Small Group Connections

Small group interactions provide community amongst students by age and sex and establish connections to caring adults as they seek to grow in Christ together through scripture reflection and application, prayer, accountability, and fun.

Retreats & Events

Retreats provide students the opportunity to spend extended time together deepening in their discipleship journey with Jesus and fostering closer relationships with each other and their small group leaders.

Events are designed as opportunities for students to invite their friends to join them for fun, activity, and exposure to the Grace Students environment and people of Grace.

Grace Trips

Short-term mission trips allow students exposure to what God is doing in other parts of the city, country, or world, giving them the opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus as they learn from our Partner Ministries and explore using their gifts and passions.

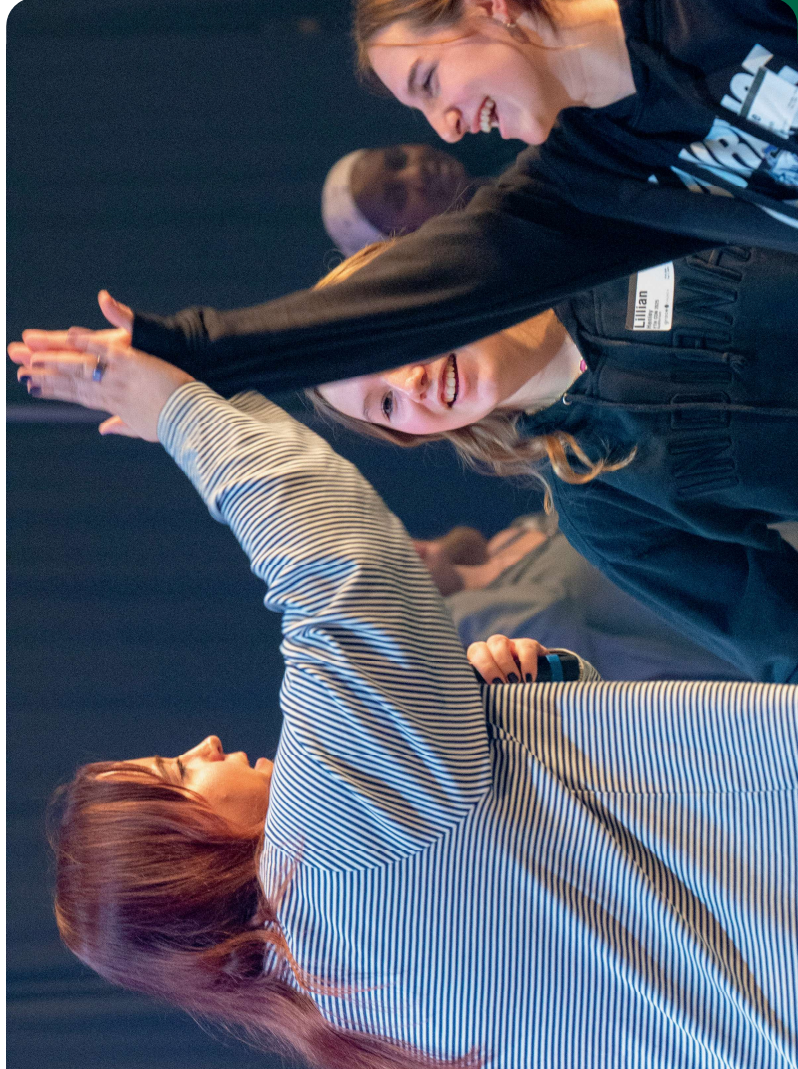
Partnering with Parents

Partnering with parents is an important part of our ministry. We partner with parents because we are on the same team and seek to support them in their primary role as disciplers in a student's life. It is important for Grace Students to honor parents in their role as we come alongside their children.

Practically, what partnership means is

- connecting parents with small group leaders
- establishing regular communications
- obtaining parental permission
- encouraging parents to volunteer regularly or as needed
- providing opportunities for parents to connect with each other and to learn together





Serving Roles

Welcome Team

The Welcome Team exists to make students feel known and loved by engaging with them from the first moment of arrival. Members of this team set the tone for the Grace Students experience by welcoming students by name and assisting them with check-in. In addition, the Welcome Team helps orient new students (and potentially their parents!) to Grace Students and introducing them to their Small Group Leader, so that they know what to expect and where they belong. Ultimately, Welcome Team members break down walls so that, for the rest of the program/event, students are more open to connect with others and, most importantly, Jesus.

Production Team

The Production Team exists to help facilitate and enhance the experience of Grace Students programming and special events. Through their contributions of lighting, computer graphics, and audio, these team members ensure that these elements help create an environment for students to encounter Jesus.



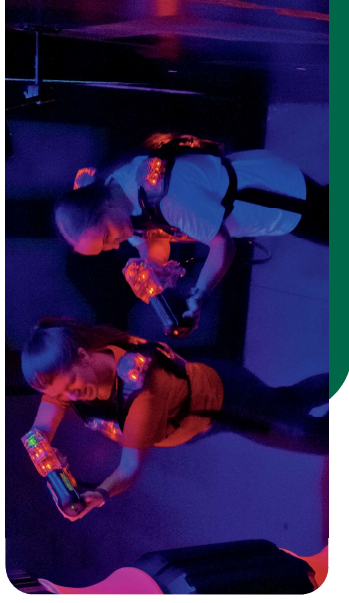
Worship Team

The Worship Team exists to lead our students into the presence of God through engaging and age-appropriate musical worship for Sunday night gatherings and special events. This team is comprised of both vocalists and instrumentalists who have a heart for Jesus and a desire to see others connect with Him.

Small Group Leaders

Small Group Leaders are a catalyst between students and their relationship with Jesus. Ultimately, Small Group Leaders help students take one step closer to Jesus and foster a lasting faith that transcends their teenage years. They do this by

- consistently investing time and energy in their students
- creating a healthy relationship with a safe, caring adult
- modeling a dynamic, growing faith in Christ
- facilitating connections between peers



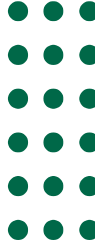
Special Events Team

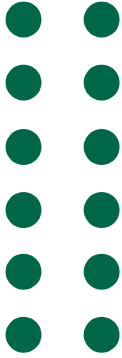
The Special Events Team exists to support Grace Students events in tangible ways. Volunteers on this team can be called upon as needed for such roles as

- assisting with check-in
- providing food and drinks
- serving as event chaperones or nurses
- setting up, tearing down, or cleaning up after an event

Coaches

Coaches engage, encourage, and equip Small Group Leaders to disciple students. Coaches provide care and feedback for Small Group Leaders through consistent observation, participation, and connection with these leaders. Coaches also assist the Grace Students staff by keeping them informed of small group engagement and activity, contributing ideas and guidance, and helping with training. Coaches may be asked to take on a variety of roles during regular programming.

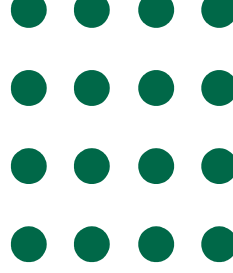


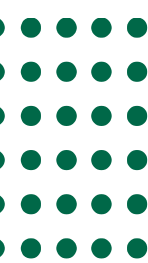


Guidelines for Healthy Ministry



A ministry is only as healthy as the individuals who comprise it. The following guidelines are intended to provide accountability and promote the flourishing of Grace Students staff and volunteers, as well as the environment they help cultivate.





Personal Health

Growth, community, and encouragement may come from serving in Grace Students, but it's not the place for adult leaders to find healing and wholeness from deep wounds or addictive behaviors. That healing comes from fostering healthy relationships and rhythms in your life.

Sharing your life with your students is a significant way to build connections and model what it looks like to journey with Jesus. Leaders should practice appropriate transparency, by discerning about what and how much detail they divulge.

Moral Integrity

Grace Students volunteers are expected to glorify God in their personal lives. Perfection is not the expectation, but setting an example for students is. This includes the avoidance of alcohol/substance abuse or addiction, sexual immorality and pornography, inappropriate language/humor/sexual innuendo, financial impropriety, misrepresentation, etc. In addition, it is forbidden to buy alcohol, drugs, addictive substances (i.e. cigarettes, vape pens, hookah, etc.) or any other illegal substances for students in your care. If you are struggling with any of these things, don't hesitate to reach out to Grace Students staff for support and next steps.

Physical Contact with Students

Building relationships with students and communicating God's love and truth are what we are all about. Jesus himself came and lived among us—touching lepers, welcoming children, and spending time with people on the margins. He modeled a lifestyle of love and appropriate affection. We desire to imitate Christ, while being responsible and sensitive in all we do. To this end, the following boundaries involving physical contact should be observed:

Appropriate Touch

- Brief hugs & side hugs
- A gentle, conscious touch of a hand on the shoulders, arm, or back
- High fives & handshakes
- Holding hands together in a group (i.e. praying together)

Note: It is good to clarify what forms of affection each person is comfortable with.

Inappropriate Touch

- Linger hugs
- Touching buttocks, chests, upper legs, or genitals
- Kissing
- Sitting on laps
- Back rubs & massages
- Piggyback rides

Note: When in doubt, avoid touch.

Avoiding Transference

As we spend time with students, it is wise to be alert to transference, the act of transferring needs for approval, encouragement, or love on to others.

Here are some clues to detect that this might be occurring:

- Following the lead of students instead of guiding and directing them
- Trying to be cool or accepted
- Flirting or responding to flirting instead of being wise and intentional

Here are some signs that this is happening in a student towards you:

- Flirting with you
- Manipulating with mood swings
- Coming to you with constant crises
- Demanding time
- Hanging on to you, literally or figuratively

Some of these signs are common, unconscious aspects of being a teenager. Others, though, are a significant sign of deeper needs. Either way, we need to use wisdom and discretion as we help them move towards Christ and maturity in Him and their relationships. Our own personal conduct (language, actions, demeanor) needs to be above reproach; nor can we accept inappropriate behavior from students.

Leaders should use discernment and avoid personal interactions of length and should never be alone in private places with students. Permission must be obtained in advance from the parents/guardians of a student along with notification to Grace Students staff before meeting in a one-on-one scenario. Under no circumstances may an adult leader date a student.

Entertainment Choices

Spending time together as a small group is a great way to connect. Please use wisdom and discernment when deciding what to do together. You will always have students representing a wide variety of families, backgrounds, and perspectives. Some will have “seen the movie, downloaded the song, played the video game, read the book,” while others wouldn’t be allowed. Be intentional, thoughtful, and discerning when making entertainment choices for/with your group. If you need suggestions or guidance, please talk with the Grace Students staff. (The entertainment industry’s rating system offers some guidance; our general policy is not to show/play mature content to any student).

Utilize your time with students to champion healthy entertainment habits by modeling them through your own choices!

Disciplining Students

Discipline is never easy to give or receive, but it does provide the opportunity to communicate Christ's heartbeat for healthy relationships and to restore connection and order. When disciplinary action is deemed necessary, we seek to honor all individuals involved by 1) pursuing the matter in private, 2) hearing all sides of a story, 3) consulting with a proximate adult, and 4) communicating values and presenting options (enabling those involved to make wise decisions). At times this means involving parents. When this becomes necessary, a Grace Students staff member will be included in the process.

Discipline should be consistent, fair, and proportional to the offense. Physical punishment should never be used! The only exception to this rule is if someone's safety is being compromised. Avoid sarcasm, compliment good behavior, communicate love, and offer a path for restoration.

Caring for Hurting Students

Indiana is a mandatory reporting state. If you have any concerns or suspicions that a student is being abused, threatened, or is considering suicide, the Department of Child Services (DCS) should be contacted immediately at (800) 800-5556. If you would prefer a staff member make the call, please alert a member of the Grace Students staff immediately. Do not leave campus before notifying a staff member or Safety Officer. Our typical response in any of these situations is to involve the parents as soon as possible—unless the parents are the suspected perpetrators. We will work together with counselors and school officials as appropriate, and we will involve staff outside of the Grace Students team as deemed necessary.

It is important to never promise a student that you will keep something shared with you a secret or totally confidential. When a student asks you to "promise not to tell," your response should approximate the following: "I'm sorry. I can't make that promise. I can promise to tell you who I will need to tell and when I'll need to tell them." As difficult as this is for both you and the student, setting accurate expectations and keeping lines of communication open are imperative for student and family health. Of course, it is imperative to always communicate with love, care, and hope.



Transporting Students

When transporting students, please model maturity and good judgement as you drive and see to it that each student is wearing a seat belt.

You may not drive a student without a parent having first signed a Driving Waiver. (These waivers can be obtained from the Grace Students staff). You may travel with students in small groups with prior consent, but you may not travel alone with a student in a vehicle. In the event of a medical or other emergency, you may transport a student, but both a Grace Students staff member and the parent(s)/guardian(s) must be notified prior to transporting.

To operate a rental vehicle for Grace Students, you must be 25 years old.

It is inappropriate to leave with students from a Grace Students event once they are checked in until it is finished. If you must leave for any reason, a Grace Students staff member should be notified and a parent/guardian must give consent by text or phone call.

Students' Cell Phone Usage

Cell phones are ubiquitous and most, if not all, of our students possess one. Because of the distraction/disruption they can cause, it is our desire that phones are turned off for at least portions of retreats/trips and muted during portions of programming and events. On trips and retreats, students will be given directions for appropriate phone usage. We are concerned if/when students

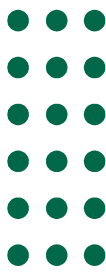
- misuse phones by creating distractions (texting/calling at inappropriate times)
- take and/or forward inappropriate photos
- make calls in the midst of an emergency without adequate information, creating a more problematic situation for those directly responding to the crisis

In an emergency situation in which parents need to get a hold of a student, we encourage them to contact a member of the Grace Students team, so that we can minister to their child and make adequate provisions.

Contact with Parents

Communication with parents is important and necessary. Information about their specific student or ministry updates will be relayed in a timely and accurate manner.





Accidents Happen

Our first priority is the well-being of the injured. Stabilize the situation and contact the following people immediately:

- Proper authorities for care/help (911, Safety Officer, on-location nurse/doctor, etc.)
- Grace Students staff, Pastor of Discipleship
- Other appropriate personnel (i.e. Camp Director, local authorities)
- Parents/Guardians/Spouse

Do your best to keep calm while offering support to the injured person. Don't move him or her or leave without a member of the Grace Students staff. Follow the lead of the on-site Grace staff member in authority. Remember that medication of any kind should only be administered by a designated staff member or volunteer.

Staff will ensure that there is constant communication with the parents/guardians/spouse regarding status and care. If a student is to be transported to a medical facility and the parents are not yet available, one of the Grace Students staff or volunteers should accompany the student until a parent arrives. Be discerning as to what, to whom, and when information is shared. Wait for updates and direction from on-site leadership before contacting people "back home" to keep from spreading misinformation. Follow up with parents/guardians upon return. And please complete or have a staff member complete a Security Incident Report.

Communication with Students

Our policies regarding communication are designed to promote authentic, encouraging, and safe environments while protecting Grace employees and volunteers and the students they are working with.

Verbal Interactions

Words matter, so here are a few guidelines. Inappropriate verbal interactions with students include the following: name-calling, belittling, shaming, threatening, intimidating, harassing, demeaning, or humiliating. Verbal interactions should not involve swearing, off-color jokes or sexual innuendo, or initiating sexually-oriented conversations. Staff and volunteer leaders should avoid discussing problems or conflicts involving other staff, leaders, or the institution itself. Spirit-led discernment and discretion should be exercised when sharing details of personal lives and experiences.

One-on-One Communication

One-on-One interactions with a student should be primarily limited to spiritual counseling or mentoring and should take place where the interaction is visible to others. Any planned one-on-one meetings between a volunteer leader and a student must be approved by a Grace Students staff member and endorsed by a parent/guardian in advance.

Digital Communication & Social Media

All communication with middle school students should be directed through their parents/guardians.

High school students should be communicated with as entire groups (rather than individually) and in public arenas rather than in private messages. Communication through instant messaging platforms is prohibited. This includes photo, video, and image content.

High school students may only be contacted via phone/text individually if written permission has first been obtained from their parents/guardians.

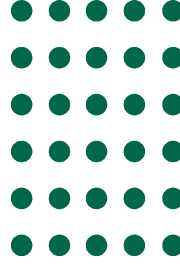
In the case of ongoing pastoral/counseling-type communication with a student when a professional provider or resource may be required, the conversation should be disclosed to both parents/guardians and to a Grace Students staff member.

Prudent judgement should be used in the time of day a student is contacted through phone or social media. Unless it is an emergency, contact or text exchanges, chats, or emails should be avoided before 8 a.m. and after 10 p.m.

Leader Standards

The following are expected of all leaders:

- Completed background check
- Participation in annual leader trainings
- Regular attendance Grace Church
- Membership in Grace Church's Core Team



What Do I Do When...?

level

1

Examples:

- A student tells you they have a new girlfriend / boyfriend.
- A student tells you something they've done that isn't morally sound but not dangerous (e.g., cheated on a test).
- A student is fighting with their parents.

Guide the student in making wise, God-honoring choices, but there is no need to inform Coaches or Staff (unless you have deeper concerns.)

level

2

Examples:

- A student comes out to you as gay, trans, queer, etc.
- A student tells you they are having sex.

Walk with the student in love without condemning or condoning their actions.

Leaders should let Coaches and Staff know so we can choose next steps.

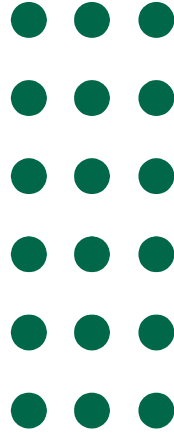
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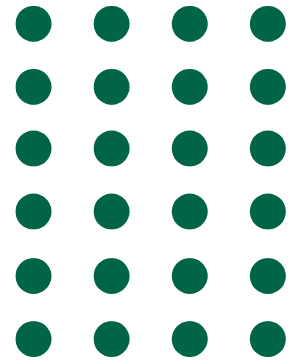
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Examples:

- A student is seen with suspicious bruises or injuries.
- A student divulges abuse (physical, mental, sexual).
- A student shares that they are suicidal or self-harming.

Tell Staff as soon as possible, so that we can bring parents into the conversation.





grace STUDENTS