



# These Little Ones: A White Paper on Children in the Home

## **Overview:**

Children are in the maternity home setting in a variety of ways.

*In utero.* As maternity housing programs, all programs welcome children in this way.

*Infants.* In the last 20 years, many maternity housing programs have begun welcoming women to stay following birth. These homes may be called “mother and child programs.”

*Long-term stays.* Recognizing the need for additional time in order to make change, some maternity housing programs have extended their program to include long-term stays where the child(ren) born at the home may move into the toddler stage.

*Pregnant women with other children.* In recent years, some programs have moved to welcoming women who have other children in addition to their child in utero.

*Women who are trying to regain children.* While their children may not be permanently in their care, some women are seeking reunification and may have extended visits during this process.

*Residents who are minors.* Some homes work specifically with minors who are children according to government regulations. This raises issues that are outside of the scope of this white paper.

## **Potential Benefits for Organizations Welcoming Children:**

- Willingness to take women with other children will increase the pool of those the home is able to serve and should increase the number of inquiries. This may be an underserved population in a particular area, and research suggests that up to 59% of abortions are performed on mothers who already have born children. (Source: <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-united-states>)
- The lived experience of the reality of parenting provides the framework for talking about parenting and, potentially, adoption with residents who are not yet parenting.
- Children in the home present new ways to engage volunteers (i.e. tutoring, childcare).
- With the extra support of the home, moms with children might have the possibility of addressing underlying issues in a way that might not be possible without the support.
- Family-like setting of home means others naturally engage in the care of the children. This provides learning opportunities, examples of parenting, natural moments to engage in the care of child, and more.
- Having children in the home presents another opportunity to communicate the message of loving each other, not being critical, learning from one another, etc.
- Women with children may be more mature and serve as role models for other residents.

## **Things to Consider for Organizations Welcoming Children:**

- Physical Space: Some described the changes in the home décor and layout as “No longer a ‘bed and breakfast’ like environment.” or “It feels like living in a day care.” Children in the home certainly dictates some different thinking about design and usage.
  - Juggling bathrooms (i.e. bathtubs may simplify bathing.)
  - Having appropriate sleeping arrangements (especially with differing bedtimes.)
  - More equipment and child-related materials
  - Increased need for a playroom and/or outdoor space
  - Childproofing the home

- Staff Related:
  - Having children in the homes may require more staff in order to provide adequate support or staff time might shift toward more child-focused activities.
  - More residents in the house with different needs means more time spent trying to find resources and support.
  - Children may have witnessed or experienced traumatic experiences and act out in different ways.
  - Some homes reported that it was more challenging to navigate “tough love” boundaries for moms when children were involved. There was a strong feeling of “the children shouldn’t suffer for the mom’s choices.”
  - Discussions involving making reports to Child Welfare agencies became more frequent, requiring training and policies.
  - Education related to child development, bonding & attachment, parenting techniques, shaken baby syndrome, SIDS, and more is pressing.
  
- Programmatic Implications:
  - Child’s need often trumped the mom’s needs making it difficult for her to meet her goals or meaning that goals took longer to achieve. The focus is on her as a mom, not her as an individual. Alternatively, some residents find inspiration in their born child(ren) that helps them make the progress on their goals that eluded them during their pregnancy.
  - New scheduling dynamics arise (i.e. getting to daycare, school, etc.). The rides and coordination related to additional schedules may be noteworthy.
  - There is heightened awareness of safety and potential hazards. New liability issues (especially around babysitting) needed to be considered.
  - Moms might need to grow in parenting skills or develop new skills. Issues of physical health, mental health, trauma might negatively impact her ability to parent. Changing parenting routines might prove to be challenging with all other changes required to participate in program. Some reported that trying to address parenting style concerns, even in the most delicate of ways, was a challenge and lead to the mom being easily offended and feeling judged. However, one staff member described it this way: “If the mother isn’t parenting appropriately, the child is running the home.”
  - There is a fear that having children in the home may limit the openness that some women have toward adoption. However, one program reported that observing the difficulties of parenting opened new conversations about adoption, not eliminated them.
  - With children in the home, there are more people connected to the resident. For example, the child(ren) may have case workers, doctors, etc. that are different than the mothers’. The increased people and issues may lead to longer or more frequent staff meetings.
  - The organization will need to investigate issues related to zoning and capacity to ensure they remain within guidelines or regulations. Having children in the home might mean that licensing is required.
  
- House Dynamics:
  - “Ask your mom...” Maintaining authority of the mother is critical. However, if staff and mom having differing parenting visions, may lead to conflict. (Ex: Who is ultimately in charge of parenting choices – the mom or the staff?) One home said that in issues related to safety, they set the guidelines. In other issues, the mom had freedom to make parenting decisions based on her style and customs.

- There was increased tension and conflict between the moms on parenting choices and styles. The other moms may judge the parenting habits of moms with children.
- “The Mother Hen” dynamic plays out with some women parenting the children of other women. This might be healthy or unhealthy, depending on the people involved.
- One staff member reported that “everything is intensified” by the presence of a child.
- Volunteers and staff, having formed attachments, may have strong feelings about decisions affecting the child. (i.e. The family having to be asked to leave or a mom losing privileges that affects the child as well.)

**Systems and Policies and Guidelines to Create:**

- Childproofing Checklist (i.e. poisons, chemicals, glassware, electrical outlets).
- Childcare Expectations.
- Schedules for Bedtimes, Bathing, Bonding Time.
- Safe Sleeping.
- Vaccinations.
- Expectations around Receiving Care Outside the Homes (i.e. going to father’s house).
- Eating (i.e. propped bottles, solid foods).
- Transporting Children (i.e. carseats).
- Field Trips (i.e. Release for child to go off-site).
- Volunteer guidelines for those who interact with children.
- In areas where there may have been adult-based policies (television shows, language choice, etc), might get stricter with child-friendly policies.
- One home developed a “Standard of Care for Parenting” with very basic guidelines, especially focused on safety (i.e. no hitting children). This allowed women to have various approaches, philosophies, or cultural traditions while still maintaining some common expectations.

**Other suggestions:**

Homes may need to set age restrictions on children in the home due to a variety of constraints. The age restriction varies significantly, however, it was commonly noted that post-adolescent boys were not allowed in the home. In accommodating women with children, especially if it was not a regular part of operations, organizations asked themselves, “Is the organization remaining true to its core mission and vision?”

When women remained in the home and were no longer pregnant, one program reported being more aware of relationships, visits outside the home, and potential sexual activity. What was “a back burner issue” became a “front burner issue” and made the home aware that it needed to address sexual activity more directly.

Safe Families (a national organization that provides temporary foster care without the involvement of the state) was a valuable resource for one organization. The mom was able to focus on her needs while knowing the child(ren) were in good care. Temporary foster care programs can also be used if the mom has medical issues and it is difficult (or impossible) for her to care for her children while in the maternity home.

One organization thought having children involved in the program might be easier in an apartment like setting with a bit more privacy. Another mentioned having designated space for or even a fully operational child care center on site as a useful solution to some of the issues raised.

**Please note: Any information provided within this document is for solely for research and meant to prompt independent decision-making by organizations.** Thanks to Sarah Saccone (*Lamb of God*), Barbara Belcher (*Nativity House*), Callie Neff (*House of His Creation*), and Valerie Harkins (*Lifehouse*) for conversations that contributed content to this document. In addition, thank you to the Leadership Council of the National Maternity Housing Coalition for contributing their expertise and feedback.



## HOUSE POLICIES: CHILDREN

The goal of the Lamb of God Maternity Home is to help each birthmother and her children to obtain their fullest potential. The emphasis of our ministry is the support, restoration, personal growth, education and safety of each individual birth mom and her children while she is here during their adoption journey. While you are here at Lamb of God we will support and love your children in the best possible Christian way.

### APPOINTMENTS

All birth moms must schedule their children's appointments so as not to interfere with the maternity home schedule. All birth moms must sign out when they are leaving with their children and must sign in when they return. Forty-eight hours' notice must be given if a ride is to be arranged for their child's appointment. Once appointment has been scheduled, please immediately write appointment information on a post-it note and give to Program Director. A weekly schedule is to be turned in every Friday to the Program Director with the Name of destination, time and location of the appointment. Volunteers may be needed to help if you are to attend an appointment with only one child and there is no care for his/her siblings.

### BEHAVIOR

Lamb of God is a home. We must be respectful to one another at all times. There is to be no yelling and screaming. Please try to maintain inside voices for the home. Outside voices can be used outdoors. Please no climbing on the furniture, standing on chairs, tables or furniture, or tipping/leaning dining room chairs while seated, because it breaks the legs. It would be preferable if dirty shoes from the outdoors be thoroughly wiped on the rugs provided before entering into the home, or take them off and leave that at the door. All patios are to be used cautiously. Parent must be present at all times if a child is to be on the front upstairs patio, back patio or recreation room. A recreation room downstairs has been provided for the children and mother to relax, play, read and watch TV. Appropriate Christian behavior is expected at all times at the Lamb of God Maternity home. All toys, books, blankets, videos or games must be put away properly in their appropriate place after being used. It is the responsibility of the child and/or Mother to leave areas just as you found them.

### CHILDCARE

Birth moms are responsible for the care of their children at all times while they are in the Lamb of God Maternity Home. Exception to this rule may be when pre-arranged childcare has been established. Please remember to put your children's names on items.

### CHILD DISCIPLINE

It is the policy of The Lamb of God Home that each Mother is to discipline their own child(ren). Children are NOT to be berated, yelled at, grabbed, slapped, hit or called names for any reason whatsoever. If a birth mom has a problem with another birth mom's child, she is to notify the child's mother first to discuss the issue. If needed, we are here to help educate you on behavior modifications and parenting tips to best equip you to be a successful parent.

***The parent is the primary educator of their children.***

Deuteronomy 6:6-9:  
 "and these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

## DAILY SCHEDULES

Children thrive when they have a routine. We want these children of God to be successful in life. Establishing routines helps with order, routines, boundaries and limits. There are countless references that support our philosophy.

## FIGHTING

Fighting amongst children is not tolerated. Behavior modifications by the child's mother must be implemented.

## HYGEINE & CLEANLINESS

The Lamb of God furnishings have been given to us by our generous donors. As respect for each other and our home we honor, a clean home is a happy home. Accidents happen, however ever it is the responsibility of the Mother to make sure that her family respects all visitors and residents of our home. Children should bathe frequently, all bedding should be washed weekly. To avoid smells, please dispose of diapers properly and empty trash daily, soiled clothing or bedding should be taken care of daily.

**1 Corinthians 6:19-20** *"Realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who lives in you and was given to you by God, you do not belong to yourself for God bought you with the high price so you must honor God with your body".*

## ILLNESS

Mothers must inform the Duty Manager about sick/injured children in the home. This includes, but is not limited to colds, ear infections, bleeding, excessive child crying, contagious infections, lack of appetite or any other physical conditions. First aid kits are located on each floor.

## IMMUNIZATIONS

All children must have immunizations up to date. If child(ren) are lapse, they must be up to date within 30 days of arriving at Lamb of God.

## MEALS

Children must eat all foods at the dining room table, recreation table or outside. No food or snacks are allowed upstairs or to be eaten in the family room. Mother's must clean up after their children's meals. Dishes, food on the floor, Age appropriate cups must be used in order to prevent spills. The parent is responsible for cleaning up after their child(ren)'s meals. No bottles, sippy cups or drinks are to be left unattended.

## NAPS

Please be respectful of napping children. Pack n' plays and beds have been provided for children to nap. If a Mother chooses to nap their child(ren) in a public area, please understand that it may affect your child's sleeping time.

## NOISE

Children will be children. However, we are to be respectful of our residents as well as neighbors. Inside voices are to be used while in doors, at appointments, etc. Excess yelling or screaming will not be tolerated. We are also trying to conduct business at Lamb of God and it is very distracting if there is excessive noise.

## OFF LIMITS

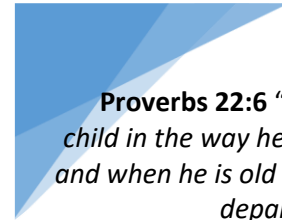
We have many visitors at Lamb of God and we are still conducting business to grow our ministry. The Business Manager and Program Directors offices are not to be disturbed. Bedrooms and bathrooms of other residents are to be respected and not used. Please use your bedroom or family room bathroom only.

**OUTDOORS**

For the safety of the children, parent MUST accompany and supervise children at all times, unless there is a volunteer helping them to specifically watch over the child. Children are NOT allowed in the gated pool area without an adult who can swim. Children are not to climb or put their hands through the fences. The front yard is not a play yard. We ask that all outdoor activities be contained to the backyard where it is safe, fenced and fun to enjoy the beautiful outdoors in which the good Lord has provided.

**SAFETY**

The safety of your child is paramount to us at The Lamb of God Maternity home. Safety latches, covers for outlets, locks have been installed to protect your child. Please be respectful to carefully open cupboards and drawers as not to damage the protection that has been installed. If a staff member observes that a child is not safe, they may have to intervene and take appropriate action for the safety of the child and our home.



**Proverbs 22:6** *“Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it”.*

**SCHOOL**

All eligible children from Preschool to Kindergarten-12<sup>th</sup> grade must be enrolled in school within 2 weeks of arriving at The Lamb of God home. It is the responsibility of the parent to investigate and contact how, what, when, where, cost of their child’s education needs. If transportation is needed, it must be communicated to the Volunteer Coordinator to arrange a ride to and from school.

**STAFF**

The Lamb of God staff is here to assist you in parenting by giving you guidance, mentorship, parenting tips and education. It is imperative that you set an example to your children by showing respect to everyone who is helping you and your family.

**TOYS**

It is the responsibility of the Birth mom and children to clean up after themselves. All toys should be put away after usage. Outdoor toys will be in blue bucket.

**VOLUNTEERS**

All children are to be respectful to the volunteers to the best of their ability. We are blessed here at The Lamb of God home to have such special people who want to be part of your successful parenting program. Volunteers may offer to take your children off site to the park, museum, movies, etc. Your child is expected to be respectful and attentive to the volunteer to the best of their ability.

I \_\_\_\_\_, have read the above Children’s Policy and agree that I will uphold as long as I/my children are a resident at the Lamb of God Maternity Home.

Mom \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_