



Safe Environments for Children's Ministry



Ages: Birth to 18 years

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Safety and Security Materials Assembled by
The Baptist Convention of Maryland and Delaware





Safe Environments for Children's Ministry

Dear Pastor and Church Leaders:

JESUS placed a **HIGH PRIORITY** on **CHILDREN**, *“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”* (Matthew 19:14 NIV) With that high priority placed by our Savior on children, we certainly can do no less.

The **BIBLE**, in Proverbs 20, reminds us to train up a child in the way he should go. We know that the ministry of our local Baptist Churches will significantly help fulfill that scripture. As parents and as concerned Christians, we certainly want our children to be encouraged and instructed in the things of God.

As Churches, we are being confronted with issues that require that we be informed about matters which will **PROTECT** our **CHILDREN** from physical or emotional harm. By law, courts are requiring Churches to deal with **LEGAL MATTERS** and **SAFETY ISSUES** that will assist them to insure that the Churches will not be liable for neglect and will better insure the Churches of **PROTECTING** the **CHILD** in every possible manner.

This packet contains very relevant material in regards to policies, safety and security issues. Annually, we will update these materials, keeping you informed of the issues that should be discussed in your preschool and children's committees/teams. Many of your decisions and policies will need church action. We desire to help you be informed about all matters concerning legal liabilities as well as inform you of proactive safety precautions which your church may choose to adopt.

As a child experiences security, he begins to develop a sense of trust that will help form a foundation for spiritual decisions later in life.

As Missionary for Children/Preschool Ministries, I am ready to assist you in any of these matters. May I suggest you keep this packet handy for ready use, and as you received updates, add them to your packet.

The Baptist Convention of MD/DE is ready to walk with you and your church in equipping believers and reaching out to a community full of parents and children.

Blessings,

June

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Safe Environments for Children's Ministry

Safety Emphasis

Current conservative estimates are that from 500,000 to over 1.5 million children are sexually abused each year in the United States.

Many church leaders assume child molesters are strangers—**THIS STEREOTYPE** can **LULL** a **CHURCH** into **FALSELY THINKING** it is **SAFE**.

Statistics show that strangers account for less than 20% of abusers. Churches need to be aware of the following:

- Over 80% of the time, the abuser is someone known to the victim.
- Most abuse takes place within the context of an ongoing relationship.
- The usual offender is 20-30 years old.
- 20% of sex offenders begin their activity before the age of 18.
- Child abusers often are married and have children.

“If abuse occurs in your church, a respected member will most likely be the molester. EMPHASIS ON “STRANGER-DANGER” will LEAVE your CHURCH ILL PREPARED. While its uncomfortable even to consider this, the most likely assailants include Sunday School teachers, religious educators, nursery or preschool workers, teachers in a church-operated school, camp counselors, scout leaders, concerned adults who volunteer to transport children to church, and clergy.”

ADEQUATELY SCREEN, then ADEQUATELY SUPERVISE.

- A “two-adult” rule is recommended for any church activity involving children or youth, obtaining parental permission for those times when a worker would be in an unsupervised situation with a child, and discussing suspicious behavior immediately.
- Overnight rule is also recommended: All adult chaperones of overnight activities should be screened in advance.
- Put windows on classroom doors when feasible.
- Have adequate personnel.
- Put a church nursery identification procedure in place.

Young people and adults need seminars in their church about the warning signs of child sexual abuse.

Church leaders should develop a line of reporting to be followed in each and every case of suspected abuse. Knowing the state rules regarding reporting abuse to the proper authorities is crucial.



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Security Emphasis

When a church has a doubt about whether it should report, it would do well to remember that a pedophile may have hundreds of victims over the course of a lifetime. The **CHURCH'S DUTY** is to **PROTECT** other **INNOCENT VICTIMS**, so when in doubt, report.

An accusation of child sexual abuse may occur in any church, so a strategy must be in place for response to any allegations.

With an allegation of molestation, the **MOST IMPORTANT** thing a church can do is **NOT DENY**, or **MINIMIZE**, or **BLAME THE VICTIM**. Take all allegations seriously, and let the family know you are going to investigate. You don't want them to feel they have to go to court to get their story heard. You want to **ACT AS CHRIST WOULD** in the same situation.

- Churches can consider providing support groups for victims of child sexual abuse.
- Abuse in a church setting is hard enough to deal with on its own; a church's wrong response just makes the situation even worse.
- 99% of the time, churches deny the situation, shun the family and erect walls—typical church response. This is the best course of action if you want to end up in court.
- Churches face loss of membership and media publicity.

A minister holds a unique position of power, because they are the parishioner's link to God. They believe the minister would not do anything to harm them.