

Child Abuse



Ages: Birth to 18 years

By *June Holland*

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



Child Abuse Policies

Churches today are writing policies for the prevention of child abuse. Procedures are written for the protection of children, staff members, childcare employees, adult volunteers, and the church family.

Adoption of Policy:

1. Appoint a committee/team expressly for the purpose of policy development. The committee/team members should be comprised of several disciplines (law, counseling, medicine, religion, and education, etc.) and represent a broad spectrum of church membership.
2. Create a perception that the church is acting proactively to prevent a future problem, and not in response to past occurrences. Ask for input from everyone. Let the entire church know that a policy is being developed.
3. The final policy should attempt to be comprehensive, should be in writing, should be adopted as an official policy of the church in a church business meeting, and should be available for review at all times.

“It is estimated that one out of three girls and one out of five boys will experience some form of sexual abuse by age eighteen.”

What this means for churches is that none can expect to remain unaffected by the problem.

Worker Enlistment:

- Every applicant for any paid position shall complete an employment application and a consent form for a background check.
- All prospective volunteer children's teachers shall complete a questionnaire and a consent form for a background check. No person shall be accepted for volunteer service before the church has received and studied the completed questionnaire.

Child Abuse Policies (continued)

Worker Enlistment: (continued)

- The prospective volunteer shall be a committed Christian, at least 18 years old, a church member for six or more months, good physical, mental, and emotional health, and possess a pleasant manner with children.
- At least two adult workers shall be present at all activities involving children. At no time shall only one worker be allowed to be alone with one child. Also needed is a small window in the classroom doors, protective procedures for changing diapers and assisting in rest rooms. Supervision of teachers should be ongoing, with designated staff members or division directors available to teachers, as needed.
- No adult or youth with known prior incidents of sexual misconduct with minors shall be permitted to serve in any capacity involving custody or supervision of children.

Work Training:

- ⇒ Each new worker should be given the legal definition of child abuse in writing, as well as, the policy of the church on reporting child abuse.

Worker Supervision:

- ⇒ Church staff should supervise on an ongoing basis and make unannounced visits into classes or other program site from time to time.

Reporting Sexual Abuse:

1. Document all your effort at handling the incident.
2. Report the incident immediately to your church's insurance company attorney, and appropriate church staff.
3. Contact the proper civil authorities.
4. Notify the parents.
5. Do not confront the accused until the safety of the child is secured.

In the case of an actual allegation, it is imperative that the church report sexual abuse. *The Church Law & Tax Report-Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church I and II* suggests several guidelines.

Definitions of Child Abuse

As defined by the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse

Physical Abuse:

Non-accidental injury, which may include:

- ⇒ **Beatings**
- ⇒ **Violent shaking**
- ⇒ **Human bites**
- ⇒ **Strangulation**
- ⇒ **Suffocation**
- ⇒ **Poisoning**
- ⇒ **Burns**



The results may be:

1. **Bruises**
2. **Welts**
3. **Broken bones**
4. **Scars**
5. **Permanent disfigurement**
6. **Long lasting psychological damage**
7. **Serious internal injuries**
8. **Brain damage**
9. **Death**

Neglect:

The failure to provide a child with basic needs:

- ⇒ **Food**
- ⇒ **Clothing**
- ⇒ **Education**
- ⇒ **Shelter**
- ⇒ **Medical care**
- ⇒ **Abandonment**
- ⇒ **Inadequate supervision**

Definitions of Child Abuse (continued)

As defined by the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse

Sexual Abuse:

The sexual exploitation of a child by an older person such as:

- ⇒ Rape
- ⇒ Incest
- ⇒ Fondling of the genitals
- ⇒ Exhibitionism
- ⇒ Pornography

It may be done for the sexual gratification of the older person, out of a need for power, or for economic reason.

Emotional Maltreatment:

A pattern of behavior that attacks a child's emotional development and sense of self worth such as:

- ⇒ Constant criticizing
- ⇒ Belittling
- ⇒ Insulting
- ⇒ Manipulation
- ⇒ Providing no love
- ⇒ Providing no support
- ⇒ Providing no guidance

Recognizing Signs of Abuse

Abuse or neglect need not have occurred for a student to be in need of protection. It is not necessary to wait until a student has been harmed to intervene.

1. Unexplained bruises, burns, fractures, or abrasions (often in various stages of healing).
2. Consistent lack of supervision.
3. Consistent hunger, inappropriate dress, poor hygiene, or unattended medical needs.
4. Extremes of aggression or withdrawal.
5. Moves with discomfort and shies away from physical contact.
6. Wears inappropriate clothing for the weather in order to cover body.
7. Withdrawn, depressed, or listless.
8. Torn, stained, or bloody underwear.
9. Irritation of the mouth, genital, or anal area.
10. Difficulty sitting or walking.
11. Inappropriate sex play, acting out seductiveness or promiscuity.
12. Sudden changes in school performance, appetite, or perceived self-worth.

When abuse or neglect can be reasonably anticipated and there are reasonable grounds to believe a student is in need of protection, the necessity of reporting applies.

Is Your Church Abuse Safe?

Please check which box applies

1. Do you or your ministry leaders interview potential workers with minors? Yes No
2. Does your church use a volunteer application for all new recruits? Yes No
3. If you use a volunteer application, does it include a question like:
"Have you ever been convicted of a child abuse crime?"
(if you do not use a volunteer application, answer no) Yes No
4. Have you ever checked the references from a volunteer you didn't know very well? Yes No
5. Have your volunteers been trained on what to do if they suspect a child has been abused? Yes No
6. Does your church take any precautions to prevent false allegations of child abuse? Yes No
7. Do your volunteers need official church approval to have an activity with a child or several children? Yes No
8. Are your volunteers ever left alone with a child or group of children? Yes No
9. Do you have any guidelines that prevent a volunteer from taking a child home in their car? Yes No
10. Does your preschool or children's ministry have a policy on taking children to the restroom? Yes No
11. Does your ministry closely supervise teen volunteers who work with children? Yes No
12. Are you and/or your pastoral staff prepared to handle a child abuse situation if it should occur at your church? Yes No

YOUR SCORE: If you answered yes to. Pease put check in box that applies.

- 11 out of 12 Excellent!
(Out of the 12)
- 9 to 10 Good
(out of the 12)
- 1 to 8 I'm glad you're reading this material
(out of the 12)

Sample Church Policy for Handling Abuse/Molestation Incidents

Whenever an incident arises in which a church employee or volunteer is accused of child abuse or sexual molestation of a minor, it is the policy of the church to take the following steps and actions.

NOTE: *Legal disclaimer; consult a local lawyer, as individual states may have requirements that supersede or otherwise restrict these policies.*



Following Steps and Actions:

1. The accused party will be presumed innocent until proven guilty.

2. Upon an accusation being made, a representative of the Church Board of Directors will notify and consult with the church attorney and the liability

insurance carrier representative for the church. Recommendations received from these sources will be adhered to.

Sample Church Policy for Handling Abuse/Molestation Incidents (continued)

Following Steps and Actions: (continued)

3. The church shall on a regular basis keep all interested parties notified of the progress in the investigation and other matters, subject to counsel from the church's lawyer or insurance company.

4. If the investigative process, or the church's own investigation, clearly show that the accused is in fact guilty of the incident then the church shall take all reasonable steps to cooperate with law enforcement authorities in any action they may take against the accused.

5. From and after _____, the Church shall maintain a record and back up _____(date) file which details the preventive steps taken by the Church in advance of any such incident which may be the subject of this Policy. These records shall record in writing the steps, policies, procedures, and implementations which the Church has prepared and take to prevent the types of incidents which this Policy addresses, to the end that the Church shall not be found to have been negligent in this area, nor to have contributed to any such incident in any way.

6. During the investigative process, the Church Board may tap into the knowledge, experience database, or other information which may exist at the headquarters of the Church denomination, or at other churches, organizations, or repositories which might better enable the Church Board to respond to an incident in an appropriate way, seeking to limit damage to the church and to all individuals affected, as far as may be possible.

Sample Church Policy for Handling Abuse/Molestation Incidents (continued)

Following Steps and Actions: (continued)

7. After consulting with the church attorney and insurance representative, and heedful of their advice, the Church Board shall direct ministerial and other appropriate church staff or volunteers to reach out to the family affected by the incident, in every appropriate manner, seeking to minister Christ to them without further regard for the eventual legal outcome of the incident.

Ten Steps to Prevent Child Abuse in the Church by Keith Hamilton



1. Any volunteer or paid worker who works with children age 18 or under should be given the legal definition of child abuse in writing, as well as the policy of the church on the reporting of child abuse.

New paid or volunteer workers should also be required to view a child abuse prevention video and read the written materials available on this subject to help the worker gain an appreciation for the reality of the concern.

The definition and training should help workers identify child abuse in the future if they see signs of it.

While exact definitions differ from state to state and between military and civilian regulations and laws, most definitions agree on several common elements of the abused or neglected child (see below).

“...a child whose physical or mental health or welfare is harmed or threatened with harm by acts or omissions of his/her parent or other person responsible for his/her welfare.”

U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, Administration of Children, Youth and Families

Sample Church Policy for Handling Abuse/Molestation Incidents (continued)

Ten Steps to Prevent Child Abuse in the Church (continued)

2. **The church should adopt the “two adult” rule**, which requires a reasonable number of adult workers to be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of the children and youth, but with a minimum of two workers at all times.
3. **The leadership should supervise on an ongoing basis** and make unannounced visits into classes or other program sites from time to time.
4. **Every paid and volunteer worker should have an application on file with the church.** The application should include relative questions pertaining to working in a children or youth ministry. The application should include areas of current address information, former churches, references prior instances of child abuse as a victim or accusation, and general experience in working in a children or youth ministry. Also, a legal release statement should be on file in the church office to conduct criminal background and reference checks. A volunteer should be a member or attending a church for six months before serving.
5. **References should be checked** on anyone working with children or youth. The reference check should be completed on all paid and volunteer workers. A reference check includes the references listed on the application plus former churches of membership. It is always helpful to ask references for additional references.
6. **A criminal background** should be conducted on all paid employees and volunteers having contact with children under 18 years old. The criminal background check could be accomplished through a local law enforcement agency or through a website like www.screenchurchstaff.com or www.volunteersselect.com. It is very important the criminal background check is conducted as a nation-wide criminal background check.
7. **Each worker should be interviewed** personally by the supervisor of the ministry area. Documentation of the interview like the application or other personnel documents must be kept confidential and in a secure location.

Sample Church Policy for Handling Abuse/Molestation Incidents (continued)

Ten Steps to Prevent Child Abuse in the Church (continued)

8. **An identification system should be adopted so that the adults who drop off a child are the same adults or the adult's designee who picks up the child to reduce the possibility of kidnapping and liability.**
9. **Comply fully with your state's child abuse reporting statute.**
10. **Keep the church leadership informed of any suspicion of child abuse and report the child abuse suspicion to the appropriate authorities.**



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