



Security



Ages: Birth to 18 years

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Security Policies — Procedures

From “*Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church*” by Richard Hammar

There are four major areas in which policies and procedures must be established to provide safeguards against sexual abuse:

1. Worker selection
2. Worker supervision
3. Reporting obligations
4. Response to allegations

All paid church employees should have to undergo a thorough screening process as part of the job application procedure. The procedure should consist of an employment application, a screening form, a personal interview, reference checks and completion of a criminal records check authorization form, when deemed appropriate.

Screening form should ask the following questions:

- Applicant's name. Identity should be confirmed by a driver's license or other photographic identification.
- Address
- A full explanation of any prior criminal convictions for sexual abuse, molestation or related crimes.
- The area of youth work the applicant is interested in.
- Any training or education in youth-related work.
- A description of church membership over the past 5 years.
- A description of any youth work in churches or other organizations over the past 5 years.
- Names and addresses of 2 references.

People applying for higher risk positions such as; groups, camps, overnight or largely unsupervised activities involving children or youth, should have an interview with a responsible staff member trained to screen children and youth workers.

Security Policies — Procedures (continued)

Screening should be used for all workers, both paid and volunteer. Volunteers should only be permitted to work with children and youth after they have been members of the church for a specified amount of time (i.e. 6 months).

Adults who plead guilty or who were convicted of either child sexual abuse or physical abuse should not work with children in a volunteer capacity. Adult survivors of child abuse must meet with a pastor before they can work with children.

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

Many church leaders assume child molesters are strangers — this stereotype can lull a church into falsely thinking it is safe.

Churches need to be concerned about strangers, but the majority of cases have been people associated with the church for a long time.

Statistics show that strangers account for less the 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.”

Security Policies — Procedures (continued)

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.

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.

Security Policies — Procedures (continued)



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.

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.

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.

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.

Security System: A Top Priority for Your Preschool Ministry (continued)

Identification Card System

Permanent identification cards (one for each child) may be issued to parents with information such as the child's and parent's name and a security card. The cards generally are about credit card size and are laminated. Parents keep the cards in their possession for use each time they pick up their child.

Another "permanent card" approach is to issue parents a family card rather than a card for each child. The family card indicates the name and security number of each child in the family.

Still another variation of the card plan is for the teacher to give the parent a simple name card each time the child comes to the room. The parent returns the card to the teacher when he comes for the child, and the card is stored in the room.

When permanent I.D. cards are issued, document the issue date and other information on a I.D. Card Information Form for your files. This form might include date, parent's names, address, phone number, children's names, security numbers, number of cards issued, and so forth. When security cards are lost and reissued, this information can be recorded, also.

The little girl's eyes lit up when she saw the man at her preschool department door. "I'm Sarah's daddy," the man said to the preschool teachers. With happy chatter and bouncing curls, 3 year old Sarah excitedly went with the man. However, the preschool teachers soon discovered that the man did not have Sarah's mother's permission to take Sarah.

- ◆ Such a circumstance could be a tragedy in the making. Does your church have a procedure ensuring that only authorized adults can pick up preschoolers at the end of each session? If not, the preschool committee and other church leaders need to guide your church in approving and implementing such a plan.
- ◆ Various plans are being used by churches of all sizes, large and small. Most of the plans are variations of three basic security systems, cards, tickets, and tags.

Which plan would work best in your church?

Security System: A Top Priority for Your Preschool Ministry

(continued)

Claim-Check or Ticket System

Many churches use a claim-check system in which a parent takes the perforated end of a form or ticket that matches the part kept by the teacher. Matching numbers, letters, or other symbols are printed on both ends of the ticket. The ticket portion kept by the teacher may provide space for the parent to jot down information about the child, including special needs and location of the parents. Once the child is picked up by the ticket bearer, both portions of the ticket are destroyed by the teachers.

The ticket method can be a simple and inexpensive as using rolls or preprinted tickets which may be purchased in bulk. Use new tickets each session and write the names of children on the appropriate ticket stubs. Then tape these near the door until parents arrive with matching stubs.

Another method involves printing individually numbered carbon paper forms. After writing the date, child's name and special information on the form, the parent takes the bottom sheet and leaves the original form with the teacher. When the parent comes for the child the teacher matches the numbers printed on both forms. All forms are destroyed after the children have left.

Identification Tag System

A third basic security method is the tag system. Matching tags are provided. The two tags display identical numbers, letters, names, or other symbols. For each session one tag is given to the parent. The parent must present the matching tag when he/she picks up the child. The teacher removes the tag from the child, links the matching tags together, and stores the tags in a secure place for use again with another child.

Commercial child security tags may be purchased, or tags may be made by the church using clip-on name badges, plastic hospital-type I.D. bracelets, or inexpensive plastic key rings.

Security System: A Top Priority for Your Preschool Ministry (continued)

Security Policies or Procedures

Other security procedures usually include:

1. Requiring that parents or other authorized adults (not siblings) pick up preschoolers.
2. Placing masking tape name labels on preschoolers and their belongings.
3. Using a sign-in sheet when parents bring and pick up their preschoolers.
4. Requiring that preschool room doors be kept closed at all times.
5. Providing a minimum of two or more teachers in each room.
6. Asking preschool teachers to wear name badges.
7. Using volunteer or contracted security personnel to provide assistance in church halls, entrance, and near preschool rooms.



When adopting a security system, involve preschool teachers in determining the system which will work best for your church.

Communicate the safety benefits at meetings for parents. Letters to parents and information provided in young married adult Sunday School department also may be helpful. Post sheets with simple instructions near preschool room.

Parents, please help us protect your child by:

- ✓ Showing a teacher your I.D. Card when you come for your child.
- ✓ Coming for your child yourself. Church policies state that preschoolers are to be released to parents or authorized adults only.
- ✓ Knocking and remaining outside the room until a teacher brings your child.

Security System: A Top Priority for Your Preschool Ministry (continued)

Is a Security System Really Necessary?

Even when a church is small and parents are known by teachers, extended session and substitute teachers may not know parents. Churches of all sizes also encounter situations when a friend, relative, or non-custodial parent wants to pick up a child. With a security system in place, the church and the teachers remain accountable to the parent and release children only when security procedures are followed.

Preschoolers are precious and irreplaceable. Establishing a few simple procedures are a small price to pay for the safety of preschoolers and for the peace of mind of teachers and parents.

Security Tips

- ⇒ **Keep accurate information.** Make a list of persons who can and cannot pick up a child. Obtain this information in writing from parents.
- ⇒ **Keep all teachers aware.** The person who comes to pick up a child must have a security card (pass) and proper I.D.
- ⇒ **Get acquainted with parents.** Make home visits.
- ⇒ **If parents call to tell you of an emergency pick up, call them back to verify request and names of persons who will be picking up the child.**
- ⇒ **Use sign in/sign out sheets regularly and consistently.**
- ⇒ **Keep phone numbers and valuable information about the child inaccessible to non-authorized person, put this information in a safe and easy to locate place or use by staff.**
- ⇒ **Keep Emergency Cards, Baby's Schedule Cards, and Child's Information Sheets up to date and accessible to authorized staff.**
- ⇒ **Supervise preschoolers at all times.** Every department/room/group needs a minimum of two teachers.
- ⇒ **Take extra precautions of field trips.** (For example, go to the rest room as a group.) Carry Emergency Cards.
- ⇒ **Make sure a child is released to parents or authorized person only.** Never release a child to a person without proper I.D. and security card.