

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION IN CHURCHES

RATIONALE

There was a time when we assumed that schools, preschools, daycare centers, and churches were safe places for our children. That is no longer a safe assumption. While most adults have experienced the local church as a safe place, reports of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children have opened our eyes to real risks that children and churches face. Although much of the publicity of late has been around the violations and cover ups within the Roman Catholic Church, the problem of child abuse is by far not restricted to Roman Catholics. According to an article posted on EthicsDaily (see Appendix 3), the Associated Press reported that three insurance companies receive upward of 260 reports each year of young people being sexually abused by Protestant clergy.

While the mandate of the Christian church is to provide a place of safety, especially for those who are particularly vulnerable, it is clear that we need to be intentional about the business of providing protection and reducing the risk of abuse within our buildings and programs. Our goal needs to be to create a “safer sanctuary” where children can be nurtured emotionally and spiritually. The guiding principle is that children should be afforded the same inalienable rights as adults to protection from verbal, emotional, physical, and/or sexual infringements. As we are warned in Matthew 18:1-9 (NIV):

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

“And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

“Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

Because they lack adequate safeguards, most congregations are, in fact, vulnerable to the devastating effects of child abuse. Churches can be communities of trust and denial that inadvertently provide predators with easy access to vulnerable populations. Many congregations fail to screen potential workers/volunteers, fail to provide training, and fail to offer adequate supervision. In some cases the volunteers and staff do not have adequate procedures to follow in case of incidents or allegations. Implied, unwritten, and often ignored policies leave children and staff vulnerable to abuse and false allegations of abuse. Because they do not have an established policy, many congregations are not able to secure adequate insurance.

PURPOSE OF THIS WORKSHOP

There are many resources available to help churches develop child protection policies. Some connections to those resources are included in this workshop. The purpose of this workshop is, however, not to develop a policy, but to get church folk on board with the *need* to develop policies by focusing on:

- how to generate the energy, enthusiasm, and commitment to develop a child protection policy
- how to see that policy through with training, implementation, evaluation, and revision

The workshop will call attention to:

- the types and scope of child abuse
- the epidemic of abuse in our society
- the impact of abuse in individuals, families, and congregations
- the importance of having a Child Protection Policy
- the elements of a Child Protection Policy

The assumption of this workshop is that congregations fail to provide adequate safeguards not because they are callous or indifferent, but because they are unaware of the prevalence of abuse and risks within their own church families. It is hoped and believed that, given sufficient information, congregations who place the safety and welfare of children among their highest priorities will do all they can to create safer sanctuaries for children and youth.

Note to leaders: The critical agenda of this workshop is the protection of children. Unfortunately church folk are often resistant to the notion that abuse could happen in their congregations. Church people can be protective of their own and can be in denial about the prevalence or seriousness of child abuse. Many church members are adults who experienced abuse as children and minimize it as “over and done with” (sexual abuse) or legitimate “discipline” (physical, emotional, and verbal abuse). Additionally church folk often function with unconscious assumptions about children, such as they are “bad” by nature or that they tell tall tales. All of these factors can interfere with adults getting on board with protecting children. Hence, this workshop practices a sort of “covert education” focusing at times not on the experience of children, but on the risks and costs to the church. The hope is that even those who don’t take seriously the needs of children will, through a commitment to self-protection, embrace practices and policies that help reduce the risks of abuse.

TIME FRAME: The workshop is designed to run 2¼ hours with a 10-minute break.

BASIC WORKSHOP OUTLINE

- I. Welcome (*10 minutes*)
- II. The Definition and Scope of Child Abuse (*20 minutes*)
- III. Abusive Actions and Signs of Abuse (*20 minutes*)

BREAK (*10 minutes*)

- IV. The Impact of Child Sexual Abuse (*35 minutes*)
- V. Overview of a Protection Policy (*25 minutes*)
- VI. Next Steps (*15 minutes*)

PREPARATION AND MATERIALS

- Review the workshop in its entirety.
- Make copies of the handouts and appendices.
- If you are opting to use the DVD *Reducing the Risk: Making Your Church Safe from Child Sexual Abuse*, order and preview the video (see ordering information below).
- If you plan to use Power Point, using the selection tool in Acrobat Reader, transfer the information to slides.
- Prepare or have volunteers prepare drinks and light snacks for the break.
- Plan a ritual of commitment for Part VI: Next Steps.
- Gather materials:
 - copies of the handouts and appendices
 - newsprint and markers
 - Optional: *Reducing the Risk: Making Your Church Safe from Child Sexual Abuse*: Available for purchase at <http://store.churchlawtodaystore.com/reriofchseab1.html> (English) and at <https://www.guideone.com/espanol.htm> (Spanish) (\$39.95). GuideOne policy holders receive a 50% discount from <https://store.guideonecenter.com/catalog/plugins/items/browse.asp>

CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOP

I. Welcome (*10 minutes*)

Make available copies of Appendix 3, “Insurance Companies Shed Light on Extent of Sex Abuse in Protestant Churches,” and as participants arrive, encourage them to read the article before the session begins.

Once all have gathered, introduce yourself, welcome the participants, and express appreciation for their concern for protecting children. Review the “Rationale,” Purpose,” and outline of the workshop.

Depending on the number of participants and your setting, consider giving participants an opportunity to introduce themselves, sharing about their roles in their churches and their interest in this topic.

II. The Definition and Scope of Child Abuse (*20 minutes*)

Distribute Handout 1, “Facts about Abuse.”

Review the definition and allow time for responses to the definition—Do the participants agree? Are there any surprises related to the definition? After discussion, emphasize the point that child abuse is defined in terms of the experience of and impact on the child.

Note: Some participants may feel that the definition is too broad and does not allow for what many consider to traditional “discipline” of children. Explain that, while the topic of discipline is an important one, it goes beyond the purview of this workshop. If anyone quotes, “Spare the rod and spoil the child,” mention that the quote is from a 17th century burlesque poem named “Hudibras” by Samuel Butler [<http://www.exclassics.com/hudibras/hbii1.htm>] and is a reference to curbing adult sexual behavior. Reemphasize that child abuse is defined in terms of the experience of and impact on the child. Explain further that this is not a parenting workshop, but a workshop on church policy, and that children who come to the church should be allowed the same rights and protections as are adults. For example, if one adult hit another in the church, the hitter would be guilty of assault.

Next, review together “Incidence, Factors, and Types of Abuse” on Handout 1 and invite discussion. If you are dealing with a large number of participants, you may want to divide into smaller groups to review the information.

After discussion, ask the participants to take a look around the room and make a mental note that they are in the presence of survivors of abuse. Invite everyone to join in a moment of silence to pray for survivors in the room and everywhere, then offer a prayer thanking God for the ability to survive and asking for continued healing. Remind participants that the focus of this time together is in investing energy in making the present and future safe for children.

Distribute and review together Handout 2, “Why Are Children at Risk?”

III. Abusive Actions and Signs of Abuse (20 minutes)

Distribute and review together Handout 3, “Signs of Abuse.” Explain that children act out what they see and experience. Often a child’s “bad behavior” is a mirror of what he or she has experienced and has been modeled by adults in his or her life.

Further explain that while children are often afraid to report abuse or may think it is “normal” or what they deserve, they do tell us, perhaps not in words, but through their countenance and behavior.

Review the signs of abuse and explain the following:

- Abuse is a learned behavior.
- We have a responsibility to pay attention to things children are telling us in their appearance, their actions, and their countenance.
- Signs of abuse should trigger a ministry response.
- It is not always easy to discern the source of the abuse (abuser).
- Professionals who know how to identify and deal with abuse should be called in when abuse is suspected.
- Church leaders need to keep their radar up to discern symptoms of abuse.
- Addressing abuse is incumbent upon us in our ministries of protecting children.
- Addressing abuse is an opportunity for ministry with the abuser.
- Clergy are mandated by law to report suspicions of abuse to the appropriate government child protection agency.
- Church leaders should consult their state statutes for reporting procedures.

BREAK (10 minutes)

Direct the participants to the facilities and to the drinks and snacks. Clearly indicate when the participants are expected to reconvene.

IV. The Impact of Child Sexual Abuse (35 minutes)

[Optional: Show *Reducing the Risk*, part 1. Make sure to allow enough time for reflection on the video. The discussion should motivate the participants to ensure that abuse will not happen at their church, not to their children, nor in their families.]

Review together “Impacts of Abuse” on Handout 1. Emphasize that abuse changes a child’s life forever and also has negative impact on many people and institutions, including the church. Note that the first order of concern is the effects on children, but that there are multiple levels of affected parties.

Explain that the impact of abuse that occurs within churches is multifaceted: the experience of abuse works its way into the spiritual DNA of a church; the mission and witness of the church can be irreparably damaged; court settlements and lawsuits can bankrupt churches; churches can lose their qualification for insurance coverage for child abuse because they have not established a protection policy.

Distribute and review Handout 4, “Why Are Churches at Risk?” Emphasize the need for churches to be proactive and take the steps necessary to reduce the risks of child abuse. Explain that churches need to have good protection policies and practices in place to protect everyone.

Distribute Handout 5 and read “Johnny’s Story: Part 1,” or ask participants to read it to themselves. Invite the participants to respond to the discussion questions or, if your group is large, ask them to divide into smaller groups for discussion.

V. Overview of a Protection Policy (25 minutes)

[Optional: Show *Reducing the Risk*, part 2.]

Review “Johnny’s Story: Part 2” from Handout 5. Invite the participants to respond to the discussion questions or, if your group is large, ask them to divide into smaller groups for discussion.

Explain that a good protection policy should include the following:

- a screening process
- worker supervision
- a reporting process
- a response plan

Ask the participants to divide into groups by church, or if you are leading this workshop for a single church, ask the participants to divide according to their roles in the church. Provide newsprint and markers and distribute Handout 6, “Practices that Protect Children, Churches, and Workers.” Allow 10 minutes to review the items on the handout and answer the following questions:

- 1.) What changes need to be made in your church’s building and policies?
- 2.) What hindrances do you anticipate to making those changes?
- 3.) What are the next steps that you need to take in regard to protecting children in your church?

VI. Next Steps (*15 minutes*)

Reconvene and invite groups to report on their discussions and share their planned next steps. Encourage the participants to challenge one another to make these plans concrete and specific.

Distribute copies of Appendix 1, “American Baptist Recommended Policy for Volunteers and Staff Who Work with Children, Youth, or Other Vulnerable Populations in Regions or Local Churches” and Appendix 2, “Resources.”

Invite the participants to join in a ritual of commissioning through which they will dedicate themselves and their plans to God. This ritual can be as simple as standing together for a commissioning prayer or may involve a symbolic act that helps insure fulfillment of this commitment.

Handout 1

FACTS ABOUT ABUSE

DEFINITION

Child abuse consists of any act or failure to act that endangers a child's physical or emotional health and development. A person caring for a child is abusive if he or she fails to nurture the child physically, or if he or she relates sexually to the child.

- **Child abuse is defined in terms of the experience of and impact on the child.**
- **A child usually experiences abuse in combinations (e.g. verbal and emotional or verbal and sexual).**

INCIDENCE, FACTORS, AND TYPES OF ABUSE

- **The incidence of abuse** shows that abuse is prevalent in all communities—it's not other folks' problem. Reported rates of abuse by race are as follows:
 - Euro-American: 51%
 - African American: 25%
 - Native American (including Alaska Native): 2%
 - Asian/Pacific Islander: 1%
 - Other: 6%
- **Factors that contribute to abuse include:**
 - stress
 - personal problems/marital problems
 - difficulty controlling anger
 - personal history of abuse
 - isolation
 - mental health problems
 - alcohol or drug abuse
 - ignorance
 - cultural traditions or damaging beliefs, such as: children are property, parents have the right to treat children as they wish, children need to be "toughened up," children should behave as little adults, children are naturally evil or dishonest
- **There are four types of abuse:** neglect, physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse (which is often verbal abuse), and sexual abuse.
- **Neglect** is often a missed aspect of abuse. It includes:
 - failure to provide for the child's needs, such as clothing, good supervision, cleanliness, and medical care
 - failure to enroll and keep the child engaged in school or to provide necessary special education
 - failure to show/provide emotional support and affection and to seek psychological care if needed
- **Physical abuse** is any injury resulting from physical aggression, even if the injury was not intended. Injury can be the result of:
 - hitting, slapping (70% of child abuse cases were physical discipline that escalated out of control.)
 - biting, kicking, pinching, choking
 - shaking, shoving, throwing, pulling hair, scalding, or burning
 - forcing to sit in chair or stand for extended periods
 - drug (including alcohol and tobacco) use during pregnancy
 - Munchausen by Proxy Syndrome (inducing illness or convincing child he or she is ill)

- **Emotional abuse** is any attitude, behavior, or failure to act that interferes with a child’s mental health or social development.
 - Emotional abuse is almost always present when other forms of abuse are found.
 - Emotional abuse is also referred to as mental, verbal, or psychological abuse and includes:
 - Ignoring or rejecting: showing lack of attention and affection, giving the “cold shoulder,” threatening to abandon/leave
 - Intimidation through yelling, screaming, threatening, frightening, or bullying
 - Belittling or shaming: habitual blaming/scapegoating, negative comparisons, name-calling, judgments such as “worthless, lazy, no good, bad,” cursing, and teasing
 - Exposure to violent behavior, such as raging or mistreatment of other persons and animals
 - Excessive demands; labor/chores or responsibility beyond what is age-appropriate
 - Locking in a closet, isolation
- **Sexual abuse** has reached epidemic levels with a reported increase of 322% from 1980–1990.
 - An average of 5.5 children per 10,000 enrolled in daycare are sexually abused.
 - An average of 8.9 children out of every 10,000 are abused at home.
 - In a study conducted from 1985–1989, 79% of the children who were abused initially denied the abuse or were tentative about disclosing it. Of those who did disclose, approximately 75% did so accidentally. 22% of those who disclosed eventually recanted their statements in the course of the follow-up process—the pressure to protect ourselves from the truth is felt by children and they will accommodate.
 - Because children tend to be so tentative in disclosing incidents of abuse and because they tend to recant to protect themselves and others, it is crucial to have professionals trained specifically in sexual abuse of children (clergy are not) conduct investigations.
 - Victimization rates decline as age increased: 15.7 victims in per 1,000 children ages birth to 3 years old; 5.7 victims per 1,000 for ages 16–17.
 - Sexual abuse is NEVER a child’s fault.
 - Sexual abuse includes:
 - fondling
 - violation of privacy: forcing a child to undress, spying on a child in the bathroom or bedroom, inordinate interest in child’s bowel habits
 - exposing children to adult sexuality: performing sexual acts, exposing genitals, telling sexual stories, showing pornographic material

IMPACTS OF ABUSE

- Abuse of any kind changes who children are; abuse has long-lasting, life-changing effects.
- Abuse can have a devastating impact on the victim, on the victim’s family, and on congregations, their resources, ministries, and community.
- **The effects of abuse on the victim include:** physical injury · lifelong health problems · death · low self-esteem · cognitive difficulties · depression and anxiety · alienation and withdrawal · eating disorders · relationship difficulties · personality disorders · suicide attempts · delinquency · problems in school · teen pregnancy · criminal or antisocial behavior · substance abuse · aggressive behavior · becoming an adult abuser
- **Other impacts can include:** shattered trust · damage to families · spiritual crises · emotional trauma to church leaders · court settlements/awards that exceed insurance coverage · protracted litigation · imprisonment · negative media coverage and discrediting the Christian witness · congregational disunity

Handout 2

WHY ARE CHILDREN AT RISK?

► **CHILDREN ARE AT RISK OF ABUSE BECAUSE THEY ARE CHILDREN.**

► **Children are at risk because they:**

- are small
- are trusting
- are non-verbal or have limited communication skills
- are dependent on adults for personal care such as diaper-changing and toileting
- are unable to distinguish inappropriate from appropriate, or if they can, are unable to set any boundaries with adults or older children
- are fearful of losing the adult approval either by setting boundaries or by telling “secrets” of abuse
- internalize responsibility for others’ deeds; feel guilty for what was done to them

► **Additionally, youth are at risk because they:**

- are becoming more independent and taking more risks
- have unrealistic views of their vulnerability—they feel invincible
- are developing sexually and are often confused by their feelings and relationships—a phenomenon that abusers take advantage of
- are involved in activities that expose them to a larger number of people and situations

► **Children are especially at risk in the church because:**

- They are familiar and comfortable in the surroundings and therefore may be apt to wander off alone.
- They are taught to trust adults and in the church are often taught to obey *any* adult, which sets them up to be victims of adults who do not have their interests at heart.
- They are not sophisticated enough to separate those who use “God talk” from those who are authentically well-meaning.
- Many churches fail to do background checks.

Handout 3

SIGNS OF ABUSE

Neglect

- Inappropriate, ill-fitting clothing or clothing not suited for the weather
- Hunger or thirst
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Apparent lack of supervision or involvement in activities beyond age level
- Absence from school or lack of preparedness for school
- Desperation for attention

Physical Abuse

- Hitting, slapping, or punching others
- Confusing inflicting pain on others as play
- Persistent or unusual marks or bruises, burns, bite marks, welts (often in the shape of an object)
- Resistance to going home
- Broken bones
- Fear of people
- Excessive compliance or “people-pleasing” personality (extreme abuse)
- Rebellious, defiant “who cares” persona
- Unusual knowledge about abuse

Emotional Abuse

- Apathy
- Depression
- Isolation
- Hostility
- Difficulty concentrating
- Eating disorders
- Extreme sensitivity to criticism/self-loathing

Sexual Abuse

- Inappropriate interest in or knowledge of sexual acts or seductive behavior
- Fear of a particular person or family member
- Self-injury or suicidal behavior
- Withdrawal, secretive or depressed behavior
- Inappropriate self-touch or rejection of own genitals or body
- Genital itch or pain
- Changes in eating habits
- Over-compliance
- Excessive aggression
- Nightmares or bed wetting

Handout 4

WHY ARE CHURCHES AT RISK?

- Church people assume that nothing will ever happen in their churches.
- In churches there is a reliance on volunteers, who may not be trained in procedures that keep children safe and may not go through the same screening processes that are required of paid staff.
- Churches are often short-handed and put new volunteers to work quickly without checking references.
- Abusers are astute at finding opportunities to abuse—they will seek out trusting organizations and be willing volunteers. They know how to say the right things, and the language of faith is easy to hide behind.
- Screening workers is a hit-or-miss practice in today's churches. According to a recent report of the Barna Group, 23%—that's more than 70,000 Protestant congregations—have little or no screening processes for the adults working with young people. Thus the church is the one of the few remaining organizations in the community that gives perpetrators immediate access to children. [<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=283>]
- Church buildings often lack safeguards that protect children: they have unsecured doors and windows, poorly maintained buildings, and secluded spaces that provide places for abuse to be carried out.
- The church is often too trusting and willing to give people second chances, regardless of their past. While grace is foundational to our faith, research suggests that perpetrators who do not receive professional treatment will continue abusing, even if they have been caught and even if they profess remorse. Even with treatment, abusers are very likely to repeat.
- The church is a familial institution. Because of our familiarity with one another, we are apt to put children at risk without realizing it, and like many families, churches often keep secrets that can endanger children.
- Extended statutes of limitations and new theories of legal liability mean that churches are more apt to be held legally accountable of failing to protect children.
- If a prior offender is given access to children and abuses again, churches can be held liable for negligence.

Handout 5

Johnny's Story: Part 1

Johnny didn't participate with the choirs, sports teams, or Sunday school; but he found his place in the church in the youth group. Johnny's faith flourished as he enthusiastically participated in this ministry. From set-up beforehand to the clean-up afterwards, Johnny was always present. Johnny enjoyed the youth group so much that he began to help Mr. Dave, the lead youth worker, with planning the meetings. Mr. Dave and his new protégée were often seen together engaged in the tasks of ministry. Almost everyone seemed pleased that this family man and church trustee would spend his valuable time with Johnny.

After a few months, Johnny's enthusiasm seemed to wane. He rarely attended church services and never came to youth group meetings or events. He appeared a bit on edge around adults and distant from his friends. Worried, Johnny's parents repeatedly questioned Johnny and checked for potential sources of his peculiar behavior. One day, Johnny wrote a one-word note and left it for his parents. The note said, "molestation." Soon his parents reported their suspicion of Mr. Dave to the senior pastor. After conversation with Mr. Dave, the pastor assumed that the allegations were unfounded. Without sufficient evidence he concluded that he could not pursue this matter. The pastor offered to help the family counsel their troubled youth.

Johnny's parents did seek professional counseling for Johnny. Frustrated by the response, they also called the police and the local news station. After an intense investigation Mr. Dave was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to a lengthy prison term. The church settled out of court with Johnny's family.

Discussion Questions

What are the potential impacts of this incident on each victim?

- Johnny
- Johnny's immediate family
- Mr. Dave's family
- The congregation

What are the probable responses from the community to this incident?

How might these responses impact the church's reputation, ministries, level of volunteerism, giving, resources, etc.?

What feelings might the pastor and members of the congregation experience?

Johnny's Story, Part 2

A good child protection policy will address four major areas: worker screening, worker supervision (which includes worker guidelines), a reporting process, and a response plan.

Please reread Johnny's Story.

What screening procedures or checks could the congregation have done before Mr. Dave was allowed to work with the youth?

What screening procedures or checks does your congregation currently use? Is the completion of this checks and procedures documented?

How would a two-adult policy and/or an open-door policy have helped prevent this incident?

How would a two-adult policy and/or an open-door policy help protect against false accusations?

Mr. Dave and Johnny were often seen alone together by many congregants. Does your church have a written procedure for reporting suspicious behavior?

Did the senior pastor's response to the allegations align with the reporting requirements in your state's law?

What is your church's plan of response to the family? to the alleged perpetrator? to the congregation? to the media?

Handout 6

Practices that Protect Children, Churches, and Workers

Note: These steps may sound like a lot of work for volunteers and those who recruit them, but they are essential for protecting children, churches, and volunteers.

- **Put Your Volunteer Plan in Writing.** Every church needs a plan approved by the appropriate board that specifies the policies and procedures for recruiting and supervising volunteers.
- **Screen Volunteers.** Churches should interview and assign volunteers just as they do paid employees. Applications to serve in volunteer positions should include name, address, phone number, work experience, volunteer experience, and experience working with children and/or youth. The application should request locations, dates, and supervisor's name and phone number for each experience. Personal and work references should be checked and notes should be taken and kept on file if reference information is received by phone. Volunteers should be asked if they have ever been charged with or convicted of a crime, including child abuse or domestic violence.
- **Do Background Checks.** In many states, state police and/or the department of child welfare provide background checks, sometime for free and sometimes for a small fee. Assure volunteers that the only convictions you are concerned about are those that would put children at risk. Take care to keep all reports confidential and in a locked file. This documentation not only helps you protect children, but also shows that you acted in good faith in case of a lawsuit. Many states only investigate records in their own states and do not cooperate with one another in background checks, so it is important to do a multi-state check.
- **Require a waiting period of at least 6 months.** If someone is new to the church, the church should wait six months to a year before allowing him or her to begin to work with children or youth. Perpetrators often want quick access to children.
- **Provide job descriptions.** All jobs, volunteer or paid, should have clear, written descriptions.
- **Learn your state procedures for reporting suspected abuse ahead of time and develop a response plan for handling allegations.** Since states differ in how they handle abuse cases, it is essential that you become familiar with the law and procedures in your state. For your response plan, consider questions such as: Who will handle reports? Who will deal with the media? How will witnesses be handled? Who will deal with the families?
- **Provide a Handbook of Practices and Policies.** Detail accepted guidelines for discipline, touching, verbal interaction, and handling illness. The policy should explicitly prohibit all forms of violence: physical discipline, yelling, scolding, shaming, or using fear or guilt. (Most insurance companies will not provide liability insurance for churches that do not have a written policy forbidding physical "discipline.") Both staff and volunteers should sign an acknowledgment of policies, and a copy should be kept on file. The handbook should also include a report of suspected abuse form and should outline the internal process for handling suspected abuse.
- **Follow the Two-adult Rule.** Requiring two adults per group protects volunteers from accusations, allows one to go for help in case of an emergency, and protects the children from a dishonest volunteer who may have slipped through your screening process. Many churches also have a rule that husbands and wives may not work together without a third volunteer.
- **Be Aware of Who Uses Your Building.** If you are renting or loaning space for other organizations, check with those in charge to be sure they are following safe/protection practices.

Appendix 1

[American Baptist Recommended Policy for Volunteers and Staff Who Work with Children, Youth, or Other Vulnerable Populations in Regions or Local Churches](#)

Responding to actions by the Board of Educational Ministries, the Board of National Ministries, and the American Baptist General Board in June 2003, National Ministries has expanded its home mission work to encompass discipleship, education, and publishing responsibilities, including Judson Press. National Ministries' Children's Ministries recommends the use of the following policy.

At its November 1997 meeting, the Board of Educational Ministries adopted a recommended policy for churches and regions to consider as they recruit and screen volunteers and staff who work with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable populations.

The policy is not meant to deter persons from volunteering to do ministry with these age groups. Instead it is offered in the spirit of providing a safe environment for children and youth in our congregations. The recommended policy and related forms are included below:

Recommended Policy for Volunteers and Staff Who Work with Children, Youth or Other Vulnerable Populations in Regions or Local Churches

The Board of Educational Ministries of the American Baptist Churches affirms the biblical witness that children are a blessing from God and that all people, whether children or adults, deserve the same compassionate regard we afford to ourselves. As followers of Jesus Christ we remember how Jesus rebuked those who would hinder or exclude children from his presence, and welcomed children as the hope and expression of the reign of God. We further acknowledge Christ's compassionate and gentle treatment of all vulnerable persons who sought his blessing.

As a matter of faith and conviction, therefore, the Board of Educational Ministries undertakes to safeguard the right and freedom of children, youth and other vulnerable persons to come into the presence of the Lord through the ministries of this organization without fear and with confidence in the promise of Christ-like care.

Background

[NAME OF REGION OR CHURCH] supports all efforts to curb and eliminate any form of abuse against any human being, as well as any living part of God's creation. [NAME OF REGION OR CHURCH] is especially concerned about the emotional, physical and sexual well-being of children, youth and other vulnerable populations. As part of [NAME OF REGION OR CHURCH] ongoing work to provide a safe environment free from all forms of abuse for all children, youth and other vulnerable populations, [NAME OF REGION OR CHURCH] adopts the following guidelines for all [NAME OF REGION OR CHURCH] sponsored conferences and events.

Since 1984, churches and church organizations have been given notice that they can be liable for both staff and volunteers whom they hire or recruit who work with children and youth. Today, at least two per cent of all churches have been taken to court (sued) for the allegedly wrongful acts of church leaders and volunteers who work with children or youth. Screening and selecting staff and volunteers who work with children, youth or vulnerable populations presents problems and obstacles for those being recruited as well as for the organizations which do the recruiting. However, through careful interpretation of the need to conduct screening to protect our children, youth and other vulnerable populations, most prospective staff candidates and volunteers will comply with this minimal intrusion into their background.

Explanation of "Other Vulnerable Populations": Children and youth deserve special care because their age, maturity level and still growing sense of self make them vulnerable to persuasion, coercion, undue influence, or physical control from those whom they see as being persons having power, authority or leadership over them. Likewise, certain adults deserve special care because of their particular vulnerabilities.

The term "other vulnerable populations" is used to describe others who, although chronologically adults (over the age of eighteen (18) or twenty-one (21)) may be particularly vulnerable to persuasion, coercion, undue influence, or physical control from those who have power, authority or leadership over them. For instance, persons with mental retardation should be considered part of a "vulnerable population." In addition, persons might be vulnerable due to age, disease, dementia, physical infirmity or mental infirmity. While these examples illustrate some of the adults who would potentially comprise a "vulnerable population," the examples are not intended to be an exhaustive or comprehensive list of "other vulnerable populations."

Two Levels of Screening

Each region and local church should institute a screening process for any staff or volunteer who will work in any capacity with children, youth or other vulnerable populations. There are two levels of screening guidelines that should be followed when screening prospective staff or volunteers who will work with children, youth or other vulnerable populations:

Level 1-This level of screening is more extensive and should be used for staff or volunteers who will have long-term or ongoing contact with children, youth or other vulnerable populations in one-on-one situations. Examples of this type of position include Sunday school teachers, nursery workers, children's choir directors, child care or preschool workers, elder care workers, youth ministers or workers, camp workers, bus drivers, Vacation Bible School workers, sports and activity directors and workers, and scouting leaders. This list is illustrative only, and should not be considered exhaustive.

Implementation

After the church or organization makes a determination as to which level of screening should be performed, the following steps should be taken.

For Staff or Volunteers who require Level 1 screening:

- a. A criminal records search needs to be performed. This can be done by contacting your State Police barracks and requesting that this information be provided to you. For a criminal records search that extends beyond your state, contact the FBI to request a national criminal records search. The cost for either of these searches is minimal. There are also private organizations that will perform similar services at minimal costs. You will want to ask the staff candidate or potential volunteer to sign a release form that states they have given permission for the criminal records search to be performed.
- b. The "6-month rule" should be adhered to. This rule states that a person who has not been a member of your church or organization for at least 6 months should not be considered for any staff or volunteer position related to children, youth or other vulnerable population.
- c. An application form should be completed. Staff and volunteers should fill out an application form. The application form should include personal information (such as address and telephone number) as well as their education and employment history.
- d. The staff or volunteer should provide to the church or organization the names of three professional or personal references who are not related to them. These persons should be contacted either by telephone or in writing to verify the volunteer's education, employment history and/or to serve as a character reference.
- e. The church or church organization should provide adequate training and ongoing supervision before the staff or volunteer assumes his or her responsibilities, and throughout his or her tenure.
- f. The church or organization should be sure to maintain a comprehensive file on each staff or volunteer that includes all information that was produced during the screening process (i.e., application, notes on reference checks, criminal records search, waiver form, and all training received).

Level 2-This level of screening is less extensive and may be utilized for staff and volunteers whose duties will involve infrequent direct contact or contact only in group settings with children, youth or other vulnerable populations. Examples of this type of position might include a "substitute" teacher or "substitute" worker in a short term, "emergency" situation.

For Staff or Volunteers who may require Level 2 screening, steps (b) through (f) listed above should be followed for Level 2 staff and volunteers. Step (a), conducting a criminal records search, does not need to be performed for those individuals who will not be having one-on-one contact with children, youth or other vulnerable populations, or who would only have infrequent contact with children, youth or other vulnerable populations.

NOTE: These are general guidelines that should be followed whenever staff or volunteers who work with children, youth or other vulnerable populations are being selected. Please be certain that the above procedures comply with all applicable state laws.

No prospective child, youth or other vulnerable population staff or volunteer should be utilized if they fail to pass the investigative steps listed above.

[Adopted by the Board of Educational Ministries 11/22/97. (Supported by the American Baptist Resolution on the Church and Child Care, the American Baptist Policy Statement on the Educational Mission of the Church, the American Baptist Policy Statement on Family Life, and the American Baptist Resolution Against Sexual Exploitation of Children.) This policy is downloadable from <http://www.nationalministries.org/children/policy.cfm>]

This policy is also based on the following resolutions:

American Baptist Resolution on Mass Media

<http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/massmed.htm>

American Baptist Resolution Against Sexual Exploitation of Children

<http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/exchild.htm>

American Baptist Resolution on Family Violence

<http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/famviol.htm>

American Baptist Declaration on Children and the Misconduct of Those They Trust

<http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/childmiss.html>

Sample application for volunteers:

http://www.nationalministries.org/children/exhibit_a.cfm

Sample acknowledgement of policies:

http://www.nationalministries.org/children/exhibit_a.cfm

Appendix 2

RESOURCES

- For a list of hotlines, visit <http://www.athealth.com/Consumer/issues/hotlines.html>
- National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-888-SOS-CHILD (1-888-767-2445)
- Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4-A-CHILD
- For the Reducing the Risk kit, developed by Church Law and Tax Report (\$49.95 + shipping and handling), which contains a two-part video, guidebook, and training manual, and is designed to help churches establish their own protection plans, contact:
 - <http://store.churchlawtodaystore.com/eriofchseab1.html>
 - call GuideOne Print and Supply at (877) 448-4331, ext. 5535 (a 50% discount for GuideOne policy holders only)
 - for Spanish resources <https://www.guideone.com/espanol.htm>
- For sample church policies and handbooks, contact Rex I. Frieze, Church Management Consulting Firm; <http://www.friezeconsulting.com/content/view/25/44/>.
- For a free copy of *Safety Tips on a Sensitive Subject: Child Sexual Abuse*, a 16-page booklet and 15-minute video that offers guidelines for hiring (including background screening), supervision, education, and reporting procedures and provides simple steps you can take to help prevent abuse and advice on what to do if it occurs, contact:
Church Mutual Insurance Company
3000 Schuster Lane
P.O. Box 357
Merrill, Wisconsin 54452
(800) 554-2642
- <http://www.churchmutual.com> (click on “safety materials)
- For PROTECTING GOD'S CHILDREN, a program by VIRTUS® that assists churches in being safe havens for children and messengers for preventing child sexual abuse, visit http://www.virtus.org/virtus/protecting_children.cfm.
- For individuals and families interested in building a strong safety net for every child, look into the Child Molestation Research and Prevention Institute’s prevention plan at <http://www.childmolestationprevention.org/index.html>.
- For American Baptist Recommended Policy for Volunteers and Staff Who Work with Children, Youth or Other Vulnerable Populations in Regions or Local Churches with sample forms and copies of pertinent ABC resolutions:
<http://www.nationalministries.org/children/policy.cfm>.

Appendix 3: Insurance Companies Shed Light on Extent of Sex Abuse in Protestant Churches

The Associated Press reported recently that three insurance companies receive upward of 260 reports each year of young people under 18 being sexually abused by Protestant clergy. This report challenges the assumption that clergy sexual abuse is an exclusively Catholic problem that does not take place in other churches.

That is a higher number than the annual average of 228 “credible accusations” brought against Catholic clerics in records reported by the Catholic Church in response to media scrutiny. A priest observed this in a Fox News commentary and questioned why the story isn't garnering more attention.

While the report about abuse in Protestant churches doesn't absolve guilty Catholic priests or those who enabled them, said Father Jonathan Morris, it offers a more complete picture. “The problem of sexual abuse has no denominational boundaries,” he wrote.

The AP obtained figures on sex-abuse claims from three companies that insure the majority of Protestant churches in America—Church Mutual Insurance Company, GuideOne Insurance, and Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company.

The largest company, Church Mutual, reported an average of about 100 sex-abuse cases a year involving minors over the last decade. GuideOne, with about half the clients of Church Mutual, said it has received an average of 160 reports of sex abuse against minors every year for the past two decades. Brotherhood Mutual said it received an average of 73 reports of child sex abuse and other sexual misconduct every year for the last 15 years but did not specify how many victims are younger than 18.

That compares to at least 10,667 people who reported plausible claims of childhood sexual abuse by 4,392 priests or deacons between 1950 and 2002 in a study commissioned by the Catholic Church with the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York as part of its response to its clergy abuse scandal. That represents 4 percent of the approximately 110,000 diocesan and religious priests who served in the United States in those years.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops offers an extensive annual report monitoring sexual-abuse claims. There were 635 new allegations reported in 2006, 9 percent fewer than in 2005. A total of 14 allegations (2 percent) involved children under the age of 18 in 2006. The remaining 621 allegations were by adults alleging abuse as minors in previous years.

Protestant numbers are harder to come by, the AP reported, because the denominations are less centralized than the Catholic Church. Many churches are independent, making reporting even harder.

“This bad news for Protestant Churches is sad news for all of us,” Father Morris wrote. “I would prefer the problem be limited to any one church—even if that church were my own—because it would mean more kids would be safe. But as I have said repeatedly over the last few years, the problem of sexual abuse of minors is not an issue of religious affiliation because there is nothing religious about abusing children. The phenomenon of sexual abuse of minors in church settings is the story of sick human beings taking advantage of their position of moral authority to prey on the weak and vulnerable. If Catholic clergy were to be faithful to their church's teaching, there would be no abuse in the Catholic Church. The same goes for Protestant clergy. The problem, then, is not one of corrupt doctrine, but of individuals being unfaithful to the most basic precepts of their own religious belief.”

Insurance officials told the AP the numbers of sex-abuse cases has remained steady over the past two decades, but churches are doing more to prevent child-sexual abuse by conducting background checks, installing windows in nurseries and play areas, and requiring at least two adults in a room with a child.

Still, said Patrick Moreland of Church Mutual, churches are particularly vulnerable to abusers.

“By their nature, congregations are the most trusting of organizations, so that makes them attractive targets for predators,” he said. “If you're a predator, where do you go? You go to a congregation that will welcome you.”

America’s largest Protestant group, the Southern Baptist Convention, voted last month to refer a motion to study the feasibility of establishing a database of Southern Baptist clergy and church staff who are credibly accused of, have confessed to, or were convicted of sexual abuse or harassment to the SBC Executive Committee. This year’s convention also adopted a non-binding resolution expressing “moral outrage” against the victimization of children.

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