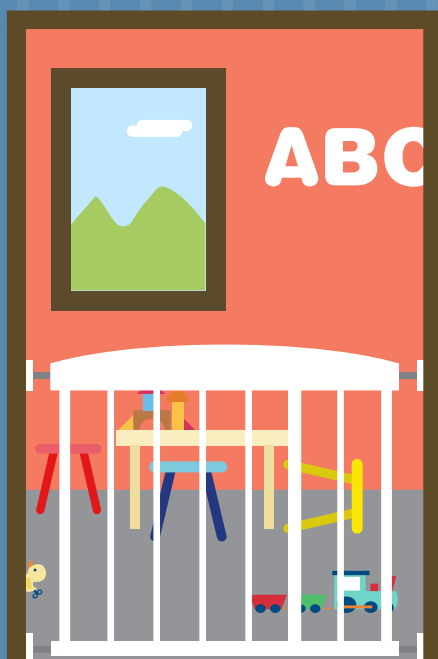


CHILD SAFETY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

HOW TO PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE
ONES IN YOUR MINISTRY



Introduction

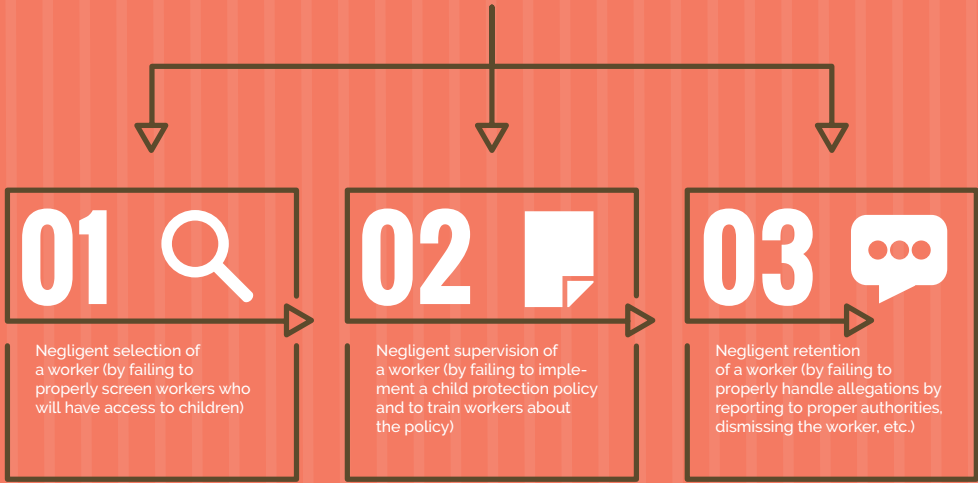
Reports of children being mistreated or abused are rising to epidemic proportions. Sexual abuse, in particular, is running rampant in our world and, unfortunately, may also be found in our churches, Christian schools, and homeschool groups. Sadly, Christian organizations are not exempt from this harsh reality, and every parent and ministry must be aware of this fact. Far too many believe it could never happen in their ministry or to their children. But it could, and the safeguards provided in this resource are designed to prevent it from happening to the children under your ministry's care.

With the exception of home, children should always feel safest at church. Parents entrust their children to those at church, which is why we must do everything we can to protect these precious souls while entrusted with their care. Leaders must operate the ministry not only to prevent children from being molested or mistreated in any way but also to defend against false allegations of such behavior. When such an accusation surfaces involving a ministry leader, speculation runs wild and imagination often takes over. And in the court of public opinion, ministry leaders are often considered guilty until proven innocent.

Child physical and sexual abuse in churches and other religious childcare ministries is not limited to one particular denomination. This epidemic has reached into churches and ministries of all denominations, faiths, and sizes—rural and urban, rich and poor. Those who wish to target children are drawn to children's programs operated by churches because of the relatively easy access they are often given to children. Where else in society could a complete stranger say the right things and then enthusiastically be given unsupervised access to a whole group of children? No ministry that works with children is immune from the possibility that an allegation of abuse, whether true or false, will be filed against a children's worker.

Churches and other ministries, including Christian schools, are subject to several legally imposed duties, each of which is necessary to protect not only the children served by the ministry but also the workers and the ministry itself. First, each ministry has a duty to properly screen any and all persons who will potentially be given access to or who will be placed in a position of trust over children within the ministry. Second, the ministry must properly supervise its workers. This does not just mean having a "supervisor" in place; it involves the implementation and enforcement of, as well as training in, an effective child protection policy. Third, ministries are bound by law to properly respond to allegations or suspicions of abuse. This duty includes not only an appropriate response within the organization but also reporting to appropriate law enforcement or child welfare authorities any reasonable suspicions or knowledge of abuse. Keeping accurate records will provide ministries—and the courts—with the necessary proof to establish a ministry's compliance with the previously mentioned duties.

Typically, when a ministry is sued after allegations of abuse or molestation have been raised, one of the following charges is made, each of which, if determined to be true, represents a failure on the part of the ministry to fulfill the corresponding legal duty mentioned above:



Every ministry must pay special attention to the issue of child safety. Ministry leaders and workers must be able to implement and enforce a program that will protect the children in their care, the workers who provide the care, and the ministry itself from civil lawsuits and the resulting harm to the name of Christ.

01 The Duty to Screen Workers:

Investigate Those Who Work with Children

The best defense against child abuse by a ministry worker is not to allow an abuser to have access to children in the ministry. Employers, including churches that use volunteers in ministry, have a duty to reasonably investigate an applicant's fitness for the position before he is hired or begins volunteer duties. This duty is intensified when the position is one involving the supervision of children. When ministries are sued as a result of the sexual or physical abuse of a child by a ministry worker, the lawsuit, in many cases, alleges the negligent placement or hiring of the staff worker or volunteer. In other words, the child and his family contend that if the ministry had properly investigated the worker before placing him in a position where he could harm the child, it would have discovered that the worker was unfit for placement in that position.

The key to proper recruitment of children's workers is to screen the applicants with a reasonable investigation of their background before placing them in a position that gives them access to children.



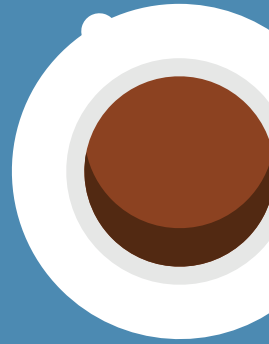
Staff/Volunteer Screening Form

All candidates for positions that will grant direct access to children should be required to complete an application for the position. This applies to all paid staff positions and volunteer positions and includes occasional or part-time volunteer activities, such as those of a Sunday school teacher or Sunday bus worker. The application simply gives the ministry an opportunity to collect information on candidates to use in assessing their suitability for the position.

Applications should ask basic questions concerning the applicant's biographical, geographical, religious, employment, and educational history. Areas that should be covered include the following:

- Current and previous addresses
- Date of birth and Social Security number and any other information necessary for conducting background checks
- Ministry involvement history, including salvation experience, church memberships, and reasons for leaving other ministries
- Education and professional associations/memberships
- Any licenses (and their numbers) and certifications held by the applicant that will be relevant to the position applied for, especially a current driver's license if duties will include transporting children for the ministry (if the applicant will be driving a 15-passenger van or a bus, ask whether or not he has a CDL with a school bus endorsement)
- The names and addresses of several references who are not relatives
- General employment experience, including addresses, duties, length of employment, and reasons for leaving
- Previous experience as a childcare worker
- General background, including any use of drugs or alcohol, history of violence, or use of pornography
- Criminal history background, including conviction for any crime, such as child abuse or neglect and whether any criminal charges are pending (NOTE: some states prohibit an employer's terminating a person's arrest record when the arrest does not

Applications should also contain a statement for candidates to sign verifying the information provided in the application is true and complete and that they understand that omissions from or misinformation in the application may result in the rejection of the application or dismissal from employment if they have already been hired.



Reference and Background Checks



Contact previous employers and other references in writing, giving them a form to complete and return to the ministry in a self-addressed, stamped envelope marked “Confidential” on the outside or, in the alternative, by means of a confidential online portal. Ask each former employer the reason for the applicant’s departure, whether or not the employer would rehire the applicant, and whether his work attendance and punctuality were satisfactory. Keep a record of when the written inquiry was sent, to whom it was sent, and the name of the person who sent it. Written responses to the reference inquiry should be filed in the applicant’s confidential file. Verify any educational degrees as well as licenses and certifications held by the applicant that are pertinent to the position for which he has applied, including a driver’s license, childcare license, nursing license, etc.



Every ministry should conduct a comprehensive background check on all workers who will work with or have direct access to children in the ministry; however, this check should be made only on those applicants who have successfully completed the application review, the reference check, and the interview (see below) and are still good candidates for the position. If the ministry is interested in the person, the NCLL recommends obtaining a nationwide background check on the person. Many companies exist to provide background check services. In addition, most states currently maintain a searchable online database of convicted sex offenders, many of which can be accessed instantly and free of charge.¹

Applicants should be asked to sign a form accompanying the application/screening form in which applicants authorize the ministry to contact their references and grant permission for the references to provide applicants’ information to the ministry. This statement should also include a provision releasing applicants’ references and the ministry from any damages that may result from the reference checks.



Once these documents are received, carefully review them, noting any unanswered questions, inconsistent statements, or any unexplained gaps in each applicant’s history. Make a note to question applicants about any problems with their applications during your interviews with them.

¹The sex offender database for your state may easily be found by conducting an internet search for “[Your State] sex offender database” or by visiting a website such as www.sexoffender.com that maintains a list of links to the various states’ databases.

Interviewing Applicants

Once the reference check has been completed, interview those applicants in whom you still have an interest. This should be the time when you question them about any gaps or discrepancies in their applications, documenting their explanations for the discrepancies. It should also be the time when you allow them to ask questions about the positions they wish to fill and about the church or ministry in general. If the ministry still decides to hire persons who have discrepancies in either their applications or between their applications and their reference responses, the person making hiring decisions should document on what basis he decided to overlook the problem areas.



The above-described process of screening is essential for all paid ministry employees and volunteers who will have access to children in the ministry. Part-time volunteers who will have access to children, such as Sunday school teachers, should, at the very least, be interviewed and background-checked. To provide the maximum amount of protection for the ministry and the children it serves, however, the NCLL recommends as a best practice that those who wish to work on a part-time volunteer basis with children undergo the complete screening process recommended above.

The process for screening teens who wish to volunteer in the children's ministry will probably not include background checks, since some juvenile records are sealed. Where juvenile registries are available, however, they should be checked. Teens should also submit references and letters of recommendation before they are allowed to work with children. If a teen has worked outside of his home, has babysat, or has volunteered in another organization, adults responsible for the teen in those settings would be ideal references. Teens should also fill out as much of the application as possible.

02

The Duty to Supervise Workers:

Develop a Child Protection Policy and Train Workers

In recent years, many ministries have begun to develop formal child protection policies. This is the first critical step in ensuring the safety and security of the children in your ministry. For ministries that have yet to implement a formal child protection plan or system, this resource will assist in that process.

A child protection policy is important in several ways. Initially, the task of drafting the policy will cause ministry leaders to focus on the ministry's duty to protect children and on ways to carry out that responsibility. The policy also informs workers and volunteers in children's ministries that leaders consider the prevention of child abuse to be a critically important matter that leaders take very seriously. A well-drafted policy will also warn abusers that the ministry will not tolerate their illegal and sinful behavior, even if they are long-time members or leaders. The knowledge that they will not be able to hide behind the ministry if they are caught abusing children may prevent some who might be tempted to abuse children from making any such attempt.



The policy will be especially helpful in instructing and then reminding children's workers of procedures that can protect children from harm and themselves from false allegations of child abuse. Having in place the written child abuse prevention rules demonstrates the ministry's professionalism and gives children's workers a comfort level that the ministry is doing everything possible to protect them and children from danger.

Liability insurance companies that underwrite liability coverage for churches and other religious organizations are beginning to require written child abuse prevention policies before they will issue coverage for claims involving child abuse. They want to be sure that their insured, the ministry, takes the child abuse prevention problem very seriously. The company will not only want to assure itself that a policy is in place but also that the ministry is carefully enforcing the policy and training its workers in the policy requirements.



General Contents of the Policy

No standard child protection policy will fit every ministry. Each policy must be carefully drafted to meet the individual needs of the ministry, while balancing a compassionate and loving ministry heart with the need for strictly followed rules governing workers' contact with children.

Once a ministry has developed a child protection policy, provide a copy of the policy to all workers and have them sign a statement acknowledging that they have read and agree to abide by the policy. Train all workers in what is expected of them before they begin their jobs and throughout their tenure with the ministry. Failing to properly supervise children's workers could subject the ministry to liability for negligent supervision. Every child abuse prevention policy should cover certain key areas:



Purpose

Explain the purpose in adopting the policy. Use this section to explain the ministry's awareness of the problem of child abuse and its intention to do everything reasonably within its power to protect children in the ministry and the workers who minister to them.

Biblical Foundation

The policy should explain the scriptural support compelling the ministry to adopt the policy to protect children and ministry workers. Quote several verses describing the biblical duty to protect children.

The General Policy Statement

This is the place for the ministry to express its abhorrence of child abuse and its resolve to prevent it from happening within the ministry. Here too is where the ministry can establish that it intends to report any reasonable suspicions of abuse, whether the abuse is carried out by a ministry worker or outside the ministry by someone else. Explain to whom the policy and its rules apply.

Definitions

Any words that are technical in meaning or that have multiple meanings should be defined to eliminate confusion and to establish conformity with state legal requirements. Include the legal definitions of such terms as *physical abuse*, *sexual abuse*, and *neglect*. Incorporate in this section how your state law defines a "child" for purposes of child abuse reporting, as well as who, by law, is a mandatory child abuse reporter.²

The Rules

The policy must list the specific rules that are being implemented to reduce the risk of child abuse. Explain that children's workers will be screened and required to undergo criminal and civil records checks. Do not forget to describe your policies on the use of corporal discipline. (NOTE: The NCLL strongly recommends against the use of corporal discipline by anyone except the child's own parents.)

Explain the rules for taking youth on overnight and off-campus activities, transporting children, being alone with children, taking children to the restroom, working in the nursery, and how to handle children who become unruly or a threat to themselves or others. This section needs to be very detailed. Once you have listed the general rules to reduce the possibility of child abuse, you may wish to implement rules that will govern age-specific groups of children.

Child Abuse Reporting Procedure

If the ministry has not already implemented a child abuse reporting procedure, it should do so in its child protection policy. The policy should clearly establish the ministry's procedures for reporting abuse both internally and to child protective services and/or law enforcement.

²The vast majority of states define a "child," for purposes of mandatory reporting, as any child who has not reached his or her 18th birthday. Be sure to check your state's child abuse reporting statute, however, to verify the law in your state. Each state also determines who in that state is a mandated or mandatory reporter of known or suspected child abuse. Some states only require professionals who work with children to report suspected abuse to child protective services or law enforcement, while many others require every person who knows or suspects a child is or may be abused to report. Many states require volunteers who work with children, such as church Sunday school and bus workers, to report suspected abuse.

Specific Policy Recommendations

The following rules should be the minimum expected of a ministry's children's workers.

Two-Adult Rule

As much as possible, no adult should ever be alone with a child, especially a child of the opposite sex. It is particularly important that no male teacher ever be alone with a child. Furthermore, it is always best if at least one adult female is always present in rooms or situations when two or more men are working with children.

Always endeavor to use the buddy system: have two adult workers present at all times. If a ministry does not follow the buddy system, it is unnecessarily exposed to the potential for false accusations, child welfare and police investigations, arrests, trials, convictions, jail terms, and civil lawsuits that could destroy the reputation of the ministry and potentially bankrupt it and its workers. These frightening possibilities can easily be avoided by making sure children's workers are never placed in the vulnerable position of not having an adult witness to verify their innocence. **This first rule is the most important of all the abuse prevention principles presented in this resource.**

Whenever possible, a teenager should not be considered the "lead" adult in working with children. Permitting teenagers to have sole responsibility for younger children, either in the classroom, the restrooms, or elsewhere, is courting danger. Older teens who have demonstrated a sufficient level of responsibility could serve as the second adult in classes with small children for purposes of the buddy system. This grants the added benefit of mentoring teens toward becoming effective and conscientious ministry workers as they mature into adulthood.



In many churches, husbands and wives work together in children's classrooms or nurseries. While this can be a wonderful opportunity for the couple to minister as a team, it also creates potential accountability issues. A court or jury will be less inclined to believe the testimony of a spouse, who has a stake in the outcome of the conviction or exoneration of the accused, over the testimony of a worker who is not related to an alleged abuser, regarding what did or did not occur in a classroom. For this reason, whenever possible, husband/wife teams should be considered one person for the buddy system, and an additional unrelated adult or mature teen should be present in these classrooms.

No teacher should ever invite a student to stay overnight alone at his or her home. In fact, in this day and age, the safest course of action is to limit or ban sleepovers and all-nighters entirely. Inviting an isolated student to stay overnight at a worker's home is inviting allegations of abuse. Teachers who organize camping trips or other overnight outings must always make sure more than one adult chaperone will be present throughout the trip. Teachers who bring unrelated children to activities at the request of the ministry should do so only if another adult is in the vehicle. Informal, non-ministry-related arrangements made directly between parents or others for transportation of their children are not within the scope of these policy recommendations.

APPROPRIATE TOUCH

Teachers and workers should touch children only if absolutely necessary. Men in the ministry are particularly vulnerable to false allegations of touching and sexual abuse, since the vast majority of child sexual offenders are men. Therefore, the most prudent and safest course of action would be to endeavor never to physically embrace or caress any child. Always remember that an adult touching a child who is not his own may be viewed suspiciously. A worker known for “always hugging all the kids” is more vulnerable to an accusation of abuse than one who keeps an appropriate distance.

Older children should not be permitted to sit on any worker’s lap for extended periods. While this may often be necessary with very small children, ministry workers should understand the increased risk these actions represent and act with discretion.



NURSERY SIGN-IN AND RELEASE OF CHILDREN

All ministries should have a system in place for releasing nursery and toddler-aged children only to the person who dropped the child off or his/her designee. Parents should sign in the child, and a number should be clipped or taped to the child’s clothing (being careful not to damage clothing). Give the same number to the parent on a card or bracelet. The child should not be released to anyone without returning this number to the nursery where the child is located.

Note the name of the child and parent and the number assigned to them on a sign-in sheet. Also use the card to note any bruises, scratches, or other possible indications of abuse when the child was left with nursery attendants. Another adult worker should verify those injuries and sign the card.

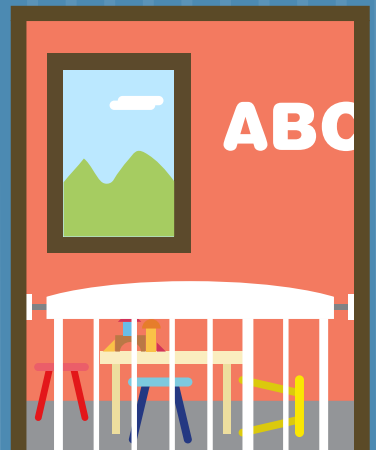
COUNTING CHILDREN

If a teacher takes a class out of the room, she should count the number of children who leave and the number who return to the room. Never bring back fewer children than were taken out. If a school or church takes a trip using a ministry vehicle, count the number of children at each stage of the trip: when they are getting in the vehicle, leaving the vehicle during the activity, returning to the vehicle, getting off the vehicle, and returning to the classroom. NEVER leave a child in a locked van or bus or alone in a park or on a playground.



PROPER INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

No children’s worker, including teens, should act as a child’s friend in an inappropriately familiar or immature manner. A worker must always maintain his proper status of respect and authority and must act accordingly. This does not mean he cannot be friendly, but it does mean that he must act at all times with the respect and dignity that is due his age and position. Because inappropriate behavior is a frequent early warning sign of a larger problem, workers should avoid even the appearance of impropriety in this area.



ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS WITH STUDENTS

Children and youth workers should be prohibited from emailing, texting, or sending private messages through social media sites to children or teens with whom they work at the ministry. Any communications should be sent to a group rather than to individuals, or messages should be communicated through parents or guardians. Any messages sent to children/teens should also be sent to parents at the same time.

KEEPING PARENTS INFORMED AND INVOLVED

Children's workers should make every effort to keep parents informed about and involved in their child's activities. Regularly invite parents into the classroom to show them how the class operates. Request their help as chaperones on class trips and at class parties.

Send notices to them about the progress of their children in memory work, behavior, attentiveness, kindnesses, etc. Do not let parents hear only of their child's misconduct. Send notices to parents of any unusual behavior or discipline problems with their child. If a teacher has been required to exercise any form of discipline, she should immediately send notice of that fact to the parents. Teachers should obtain a signed permission form that also contains liability release and indemnity language from each child's parent for each specific ministry activity that takes the child off the premises.

Teachers should not personally assume the responsibilities of parents. A teacher should not enter a home to dress a child if the child is not ready for ministry activities. As much as a teacher might wish to do so, she should not take a child shopping for personal items. If a teacher is aware of a legitimate need in a child's life, she should notify the ministry leadership and together they can assist the parents in caring for the child's needs through the ministry. In other words, ministering to a child's personal needs should be taken care of officially through the ministry and not on the side by one individual.

03

The Duty to Report Child Abuse and Neglect:

Respond Appropriately to Allegations



MANDATORY LEGAL REPORTING

All staff and workers should be trained in the state's child abuse reporting law requirements. Review with them the state's definition of child abuse, child neglect, child sexual abuse, educational neglect, and other types of abuse or neglect that are required by law to be reported. Make certain each worker knows whether he or she is a mandatory reporter. In many states, anyone who has a reasonable suspicion that a child has been or is being abused or neglected is required to report to the appropriate state agency. Carefully review with the mandatory reporters to whom they must report, what the report must contain, how quickly after learning of the abuse the report must be made (in most states, this ranges from "immediately" to within 72 hours), and whether the oral report needs to be followed by a written report and, if so, how quickly.

Make certain children's workers realize that if they are required or mandatory reporters under state law, informing their supervisor or the pastor of the abuse does not satisfy the mandatory reporting requirements. The NCLL recommends that teachers and workers notify the pastor or his designee of all reasonable suspicions of abuse and that both make the report together, informing the report intake official that they are both making the call. The teacher should keep a record of when she first had a reasonable suspicion of abuse, when and what she reported to officials, and to whom she spoke. Speaking with the parent of a child about the mandatory reporter's suspicions does not absolve the mandatory reporter from making her report to officials.



Internal Ministry Response to Allegations

If allegations of child abuse are raised against a ministry worker, the pastor or director, or his designee, should immediately contact the ministry's attorney. Inform the worker of the allegations and discuss them with him. If he admits the allegations, inform him of your intent to report the incident to the appropriate authorities. If he denies the allegations, inform him that you will be conducting an internal investigation of the claims to determine whether there is a reasonable suspicion that abuse has occurred. If the ministry or the worker at any time believes that reasonable suspicion exists, then the worker (in most states) becomes a mandatory reporter.

For his own protection, as well as for the protection of the children, the person accused, whether he admits or denies the allegations, should be removed from any position that gives him access to children. The worker who admits the abuse should be immediately terminated if he is a ministry employee or volunteer and should never be permitted to work with children again. The employee who denies the allegation should be placed on administrative leave while the confidential internal investigation is conducted. If that investigation demonstrates there is no reasonable suspicion of child abuse, the worker can be returned to his post and no report to authorities needs to be made.



If the attorneys of the accused permit it, reach out to meet the needs of the family of the accused, who are also victims of the allegations' repercussions. Treat the accused with dignity while the investigation is underway. If he is charged, continue to show him support as an individual, while not condoning the sin he may have committed.

Sometimes ministry workers become aware of situations that do not involve other ministry workers at all but rather the child's parent or caretaker. In instances where the parents or caretakers are not acting in the best interests of the child, the pastor, director, or his designee should deal with these actions. The pastor, not the teacher, is the spiritual leader of the parents. If the pastor designates the teacher to counsel with the parents about their relationship with the child, the teacher should never engage in such counseling without another adult ministry worker being present.

Indicators of Child Abuse and Neglect

Many of the indicators of abuse may also be caused by something innocent. Generally, however, the presence of several of these signs in a child may mean that the child is at risk and that further investigation of the child's circumstances should be made. When you have concerns for a child's well-being, the indicators listed below may help guide you in your thought process.

Signs of Physical Abuse

Physical Indicators

- Unexplained bruises and welts in unusual patterns or shapes that suggest the use of an instrument (belt buckle, electric cord, etc.) on a child in various stages of healing
- Unexplained burns
- Rope burns
- Infected burns indicating delay in treatment or burns in the shape of common household utensils or appliances

Behavioral Indicators

- Behavioral extremes (withdrawal, aggression, regression, depression)
- Inappropriate or excessive fear of parent or caretaker
- Antisocial behavior such as substance abuse, truancy, running away, fear of going home
- Unbelievable or inconsistent explanation for injuries
- Lies unusually still while surveying surroundings (for infants)
- Unusual shyness or wariness of physical contact

Signs of Neglect

Physical Indicators

- Poor hygiene, including lice, scabies, severe/untreated diaper rash, bedsores, body odor
- Perpetual squinting
- Unsuitable clothing: missing key articles of clothing (underwear, socks, shoes); overdressed or underdressed for climate conditions
- Untreated injury or illness
- Indicators of prolonged exposure to the elements (excessive sunburn, insect bites)
- Height and weight significantly below

Behavioral Indicators

- Chronic absenteeism (in a school setting)
- Erratic attendance (in a school setting)
- Chronic hunger, tiredness, or lethargy
- Begging or collecting leftovers
- Assuming adult responsibilities
- Reporting no caretaker at home

Signs of Emotional Abuse

Physical Indicators

- Eating disorders, including obesity or anorexia
- Speech disorders (stuttering, stammering)
- Developmental delays in the acquisition of speech or motor skills
- Weight or height level substantially below norm
- Flat or bald spots on head (infants)
- Nervous disorders (rashes, hives, facial tics or spasms, stomach aches)

Behavioral Indicators

- Habit disorders (biting, rocking, head-banging)
- Cruel behavior: seeming to get pleasure from hurting children, adults, or animals; seeming to get pleasure from being mistreated
- Age-inappropriate behaviors (bedwetting, soiling)
- Behavioral extremes including the following: overly compliant/demanding, withdrawn/aggressive, listless/excitable

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Physical Indicators

- Torn or stained clothing
- Frequent, unexplained sore throats; infections
- Physical complaints, including pain and irritation of the child's private areas
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Bruises or bleeding
- Pregnancy

Behavioral Indicators

- The victim's disclosure of abuse
- Regressive behaviors (thumbsucking, bedwetting, fear of the dark)
- Promiscuous or seductive behaviors
- Disturbed sleep patterns (recurrent nightmares)
- Unusual and age-inappropriate interest in sexual matters
- Avoidance of undressing or wearing extra layers of clothes
- Sudden decline in school performance/truancy
- Difficulty in walking or sitting



KEEPING RECORDS

In the event that allegations ever surface surrounding a ministry worker's abuse or molestation of a child or teen, the ministry's ability to produce records demonstrating that it was not negligent in the protection of the victim will certainly make it much easier to prove in court that the ministry should not be held legally liable for failing to protect the child. Even more importantly, being able to produce the records to parents, police, and attorneys could ward off potential lawsuits or convince insurance companies to continue covering the ministry's children's ministries.

Teachers and children's workers should keep timely, accurate, and detailed records of worker and student attendance and every situation that could evidence or create a potential problem. This includes evidence of abuse, worker rule infractions, discipline issues, or any other significant incidents. These records need not be long and drawn out; workers need only include what is necessary to remind them of the incident at a later time.

The ministry should retain records relating to children forever. The ministry may use the records as evidence in lawsuits brought long after a child has become an adult. In at least some states, there is no statute of limitations on a claim of childhood sexual abuse. A teacher's memory will never be as credible a form of evidence as will accurate, timely, and complete records. A specific teacher may no longer even work at the ministry when it is sued over an incident, but the record will still be accessible as evidence.



Attendance Records

Attendance records for every classroom, nursery, youth event, and ministry-provided transportation (usually a bus or van ministry) should be included. These records could become important in the event the ministry and/or teacher were ever sued. If the records demonstrate that the child or teacher/worker was not in attendance on the date claimed in a lawsuit, the court might dismiss the case. If the teacher is not able to make a timely attendance record for the class or event, she should delegate the responsibility to another responsible worker. These records should be accurate and include the names of each child, each adult worker, and the date of the class or event.



Activity Consent and Liability Waiver Forms

Activity consent and liability waiver forms specific to high-risk activities or activities that take minors off the ministry property are invaluable in avoiding lawsuits or in demonstrating to a jury that parents were aware of and agreed to the risks attendant to the specific activity in which a child was injured. Before a child is permitted to attend an activity, the staff member or volunteer directing the activity should be certain the child has returned this form. If there is no signed release form in hand for a child at the time of the activity, do not permit him to take part in the activity.

The form should list all specific activities that will take place on an outing, and staff and volunteers should be warned not to substitute activities that have not been specifically listed. Retain the consent and release form permanently.



Evidence of Abuse

Note any evidence raising a reasonable suspicion that a child may be abused at home. At this point, under the laws of most states, the teacher becomes a mandatory child abuse reporter. Note any time a child is out of the classroom for an unexplained length of time. Ask the child why he was gone so long.

For ministry-provided transportation, the attendance records should note by date the following information:

- The name of each child and where he/she was picked up
- Any children whose parents or their representatives picked the children up at the ministry's property rather than being taken home by the ministry workers
- Any incidents of scuffling or injury while on a ministry vehicle
- Any suspicious marks or bruising on the child when he boards a ministry vehicle
- The names of each adult and youth worker
- Any other out-of-the-ordinary circumstance concerning the child or a ministry vehicle ride. For instance, if a bus or van broke down, did the children remain there for two hours while the vehicle was repaired, or was another vehicle called to finish the route? Did a child leave the vehicle before his typical drop-off spot?



Disciplinary Actions

All matters of student discipline should be documented. Include such discipline methods as time-outs and removing a child from a classroom and whether notice of the disciplinary action was sent to the parent. Note whether a conference with a parent is/ was necessary and, if so, the details of the conference. Note any discussions with the pastor or Sunday school superintendent as to whether the child should be asked not to attend the class until his behavior improves.



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