



Reducing the Risks at Your Church

Consider the Physical Layout of Your Church:

1. Is there an opportunity for seclusion? What do your hallways/classrooms/offices look like?
2. Do you have an open nursery/classrooms that utilize half doors and many windows?
3. How are locks used? Generally, locks should keep children out of an area rather than in an area.
4. How are unused rooms monitored or secured during a service? By people or by locks?
5. Where are your restrooms? Are they single rooms or public restrooms? How close are they to children's activities? to your sanctuary?
6. Do you have windows on offices/counseling/meeting rooms? If not, is there an area you can use that is private but not secluding?
7. Do a "walk through" your buildings during an average day as well as during a regular service. Look for seclusion opportunities and ways to prevent them.

Consider the Relational Layout of Your Church:

1. Consider the various activities for children and youth, are there opportunities for 1:1 seclusion? Bus, van, restroom usage?
2. Do you pair your workers? When pairing, are there 2 or more NON-related adults? Always choose accountability. Avoid ratios of 1.
3. Examine the communication between staff, volunteers, leaders and parents. Watch for isolationist, excluding behaviors, privacy.
4. Examine the relationships between children and adults. Be aware of special friendships, "best friends," over-identification, exchanges between adults and children including gifts, food, money, extra privileges.
5. Use only approved, cleared workers/volunteers. No substitutes. Youth workers are never to be used in place of adult supervision.
6. Consider a "6-month rule" for all areas of service. No one can serve until there has been at least 6 months of regular attendance and relationship building within the church.
7. Have all staff and volunteers trained to identify the various types of abuses as well as ways to avoid 1:1 ratios.

Consider the Organizational Layout of Your Church:

1. What type of policies have been developed to protect children either by your church or by your denomination? Create policies BEFORE a crisis develops rather than during or after.
 - a. Determine leadership/committee response to an allegation. Consider all three dispositions (founded, unfounded, indicated) in your response. (This should not replace or challenge Children & Youth investigations.) Have committee address difficult questions – i.e. What if someone listed on Megan’s Law wants to attend your church? Should someone who has an indicated status on their record be allowed to volunteer with the youth?
 - b. Include DPW standards, reporting procedures, confidentiality.
 - c. Mandate training for all who work with children and adolescents to identify abuse as well as how to report abuse independently (Teachers, Volunteers, Nursery Workers, Coaches, Awana Leaders, etc.)
 - d. Define responsibilities of leaders in your church, using their roles to preventing child abuse.
 - Teachers - supervising, monitoring whereabouts of children;
 - Ushers - seating, hall monitoring, randomly visiting classrooms and isolated areas of building(s).
 - Other adult leaders/volunteers being on time, reminders to nursery/preschool workers, etc.

2. In addition to screening workers (Child Abuse Clearance, State Police Clearance), consider conducting an interview or request completion of an application with a signed release. On the application, request prior involvement with child care, children's ministries, or youth ministries and so on. Call and confirm, ask questions.

3. Develop a Safety Committee that consists of church leaders, teachers, volunteers, children.
 - a. Look at your congregation's strengths - do you have any lawyers, insurance professionals, teachers, child welfare specialists, human service professionals, law enforcement personnel? Have this committee review written policies and view actual practices. Have committee conduct random checks...are your staff and volunteers following policies?
 - b. Develop a person who is a contact for children and adolescents to go to when they need an adult’s help regarding safety at church or if they have questions. Additionally, create a listing of resources in your community that assist children & youth.

4. Consider conducting a (Safety) Children's Sunday.
 - a. Teach parents and children about appropriate contact. Teach children and youth prevention skills. Affirm it is always the adult's responsibility to treat them with respect and with appropriate boundaries. (It is NEVER the fault of any child or youth if they are abused.)
 - b. Use the Safety Sunday to review policies, talk about how abuse happens, how to prevent, current laws/changes, reporting requirements, and implement new practices as well.

5. For the most vulnerable (youngest, usually limited verbal skills), have very clear nursery and preschool policies.

Examples:

Open nursery physically, fixed nursery relationally. Only those workers who are approved can serve.

Restroom usage and supervision.

Two or more NON-related workers can serve together.

Only parents who drop off their children may pick up their children (no siblings, youth workers, cousins, etc.)

Nursery workers must have updated clearances, a minimum of six months membership.

Consider the use of pagers, number light boxes to request parental help.

Filing A Report:

1. Notify ChildLine (1-800-932-0313), file written report. (Online reporting available January 2015.) Courtesy call the local Children & Youth Office.
2. Notify your insurance carrier (if staff member of church representative is involved in allegations.) Your church and insurance policies will dictate how this happens and by whom.
3. If the alleged abuse occurred on church premises, remove perpetrator from all child/youth responsibilities ASAP.
4. Advise parent/guardian to seek medical care ASAP if needed.
5. Support the challenges the family is facing.
6. Assess congregational response, if appropriate.
7. Document, document, document!
8. Protect privacy/confidentiality of minors and their families.
9. Participate in child welfare and police investigations.