

10 Steps to Prevent Child Abuse in the Church

Keith Hamilton

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

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

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

While exact definitions differ from state to state and between military and civilian regulations and laws, most definitions agree on several common elements of an abused or neglected child:

“...a child whose physical or mental health or welfare is harmed or threatened with harm by acts or omissions of his/her parent or other person responsible for his/her welfare.” U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,
Administration on Children, Youth and Families

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

7. Each worker should be **interviewed personally** by the supervisor of the ministry area. Documentation of the interview like the application or other personnel documents must be kept confidential and in a secure location.
8. An **identification system** should be adopted so that the adults who drop off a child are the same adults or the adult's designee who picks up the child to reduce the possibility of kidnapping and liability.
9. Comply fully with your **state's child abuse reporting statute**.
10. Keep the **church leadership informed** of any suspicion of child abuse and report the child abuse suspicion to the appropriate authorities.

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