

SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE RECOMMENDED PRACTICES



The recommended practices cited below are considered basic and minimal. They may be developed further for each individual church. These practices are based upon those of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. (<https://caringwell.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Intro-Guide-to-Caring-Well.pdf>)

“As God’s people, a church’s first priority should be protecting the vulnerable—people over the organization. Care, not liability, should be our primary motivation in creating and maintaining good child protection plans. We must... understand that policy is a way to love and care for people well by keeping them safe from harm. Developing and operating consistently within good policy is God-honoring and a way to steward the trust that our congregation and the community puts in us to be watchful and protective of those who may not be able to protect themselves.”

Introductory Guide to Caring Well
Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission

PREVENTION

Prevention measures will serve as a deterrent for perpetrators. They will also communicate the seriousness of the issue to the local church, highlighting and strengthening the church’s commitment to caring for and protecting the congregation.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- 1) Form a sexual abuse response team.
 - This team should consist of qualified men and women and a combination of staff and volunteers from ministries that have potential exposure to abuse.
 - The team will coordinate the development, review, and implementation of policies and procedures to help protect against abuse.
- 2) Establish a screening and 3rd party background check process for staff and volunteers.
 - The screening process should include written applications, personal interviews, reference checks, and social media review. Minimum age and church membership requirements should be established.
 - Background checks should be comprehensive and multi-state. They should be conducted by a 3rd party at intervals of no longer than three years.
- 3) Establish best practices and protective policies for working with minors and vulnerable adults.
 - The following should be considered as important components of a safety policy: check in/out procedure; appropriate adult to child ratio; open door or full window policy; social media and communication guidelines; transportation policy; overnight policy; respect for child’s privacy; and use of volunteers less than 18 years of age.
 - Policies should be updated and reviewed prior to the implementation of new ministries and programs that might involve children or vulnerable adults.
 - Review and monitor adherence to policies and procedures on a regular basis. These reviews should be performed by the specific ministry leaders, pastoral leadership and lay leaders not directly involved in the specific ministry.
 - Adherence to policies and procedures should be considered as a part of the performance review for all staff and volunteers.
- 4) Educate and update staff and congregation about the sexual abuse prevention policies and procedures on a regular basis.
 - Every church member should be aware of new or updated policies so that they can be a part of creating a safe environment

- For victims, it communicates that the church cares, will listen, and will appropriately respond to any concerns.
 - Awareness of existing policies and procedures may serve as a deterrent to any predators.
- 5) Provide awareness training for parents and other adults.
- Awareness training is recommended to ensure that everyone understands what to look for and how to respond when something seems not appropriate.
 - Awareness training assists parents in educating their own children about personal safety.
- 6) Complete prevention and care training with staff
- and volunteers and have an ongoing plan and schedule for training moving forward.
- All new staff and volunteers should undergo training for the identification and prevention of sexual abuse. A thorough review of the church's established best practices and related policies should be part of the orientation process for that new staff or volunteer.
 - Thereafter, continuing training of all staff and volunteers should occur at intervals no greater than one year.
- 7) Maintain proper insurance coverage including coverage for sexual misconduct.

RESOURCES

ERLC Introductory Guide to Caring Well:

<https://caringwell.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Intro-Guide-to-Caring-Well.pdf>

Arizona Southern Baptist Mission Network:

<https://azsbc.org/caring-well>

CDC — Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth Serving Organizations:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/PreventingChildSexualAbuse-a.pdf> Lifeway- Becoming a

Church that Cares Well for the Abused:

<https://churchcares.com>

<https://ministrygrid.lifeway.com/#/onboarding/churchcares>

Brotherhood Mutual — Child Protection in a Ministry Environment:

<https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/resources/safety-library/publications/guidelines-for-ministry-workers/>

Church Executive Article — Child Sexual Abuse and Insurance Coverage:

<https://churchexecutive.com/archives/child-sexual-abuse-insurance-the-landscape-continues-to-change>

RESPONSE

A planned response and investigation protocol provides a procedural action guideline and ensures the investigation occurs in a proper and nonpartisan fashion. This protects the victim, the accused, and the church.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- 8) Develop a plan of action for reporting abuse to the appropriate authorities in compliance with state law.
 - The plan of action should include knowledge of state reporting laws for both child and adult disclosures.
 - The plan should also include identified contact information for police, social services, and community resources for legal help.
 - All staff and volunteers should be aware of the plan and their responsibility to report disclosures.
- 9) Establish an investigation plan involving law enforcement and an identified professional 3rd party service for criminal and non-criminal misconduct cases, respectively.
- 10) Establish employment/volunteer policies for an accused person during the period of investigation.
 - These policies should cover issues such as limitation of access to church property, events, and e-mail accounts/calendars during the investigation. Law enforcement and other experts may provide further guidance for specific cases.
 - Some churches have found it helpful to appoint a church leader as a liaison to the accused person during the investigation. This not only protects the victim and church congregation from any potential further abuse, but also enables on-going communication with and ministry to the accused person.
- 11) Develop a communications/disclosure plan that considers the needs and agency of the survivors and protects their confidentiality while also providing appropriate disclosure to the church body.
 - Safety and well-being of the victim is the first priority.
 - Appropriate awareness of the congregation will foster trust in leadership, discourage speculation, and facilitate reporting by other potential victims.
 - Effective handling and disclosure of abuse within the church provides assurance to our surrounding community that the church is a place of integrity, safety and refuge.

RESOURCES

Arizona Department of Child Safety Online Reporting Service and Arizona Child Abuse Hotline:

<https://dcs.az.gov/report-child-abuse#:~:text=Mandated%20reporters%20are%20required%20by,authorized%20by%20ARS%2013-3620>

Arizona Child Abuse Info Center:

https://childhelpinfocenter.org/?option=com_content&task=view&id=135&Itemid=164

ChurchSafety.com — Communicating in a Crisis:

https://www.hmbc.ca/hp_wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Crisis-Communication-Policy-Appendix-Communicating-In-A-Crisis-Download-from-Church-Law-Tax-Store.pdf

MINISTRY NEEDS

A report of sexual misconduct/abuse will have both immediate and lasting impact on those involved. The consequences may be of long-term consequence and require individualized attention.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

12) Develop a ministry response plans that identify a range of counseling options for victims and their families in addition to addressing the ministry needs of the church body and the accused.

- While some survivors and their families may choose to receive professional counseling through their church or associated Baptist institutions, others may choose alternative sources of support. A range of options should be made readily available.

- Even if not directly involved with the episode of abuse, other members of the congregation may benefit from counseling. Consequences of disclosure may include anger, loss of trust, and emotional/psychiatric issues related to past episodes of personal abuse.
- Regardless of the ultimate outcome of the investigation, the accused person will require assistance. Should the allegation be proven false (2-10% allegations), return to employment/ministry should be facilitated. Should the allegation be proven true, the accused will require skilled pastoral care during the difficult process of acknowledging and facing the consequences of their actions. Professional counseling and legal advice may be required under either scenario.

RESOURCES

The Church's Response to Abuse is a Gospel Issue — Russell Moore:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/6383529/video/364910307>

Sample Response Plan — Brad Hambrick:

https://bradhambrick.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Response-Plan-for-Sexual-Abuse-Against-a-Minor-at-Church_Generic-2018.pdf

MinistrySafe Article: Responding Well to an Allegation:

<https://ministrysafe.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ARTICLE-6-Responding-Well-6.15.20.pdf>

How should a Church Respond to Abusers — Diane Langberg:

<https://www.dianelangberg.com/2020/01/how-should-the-church-respond-to-abusers/>

Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused — Brad Hambrick:

<https://churchcares.com/assets/downloads/ChurchCares.pdf>

CONSULTANTS

GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in Christian Environments): <https://www.netgrace.org>
Assessments, Online Training, Policy Review, Investigations

Darkness to Light: <https://www.d2l.org/>
Research and stats, Online Training

Ministry Safe: <https://ministrysafe.com/>
Training, Legal Consultation, Background Checks

Protect My Ministry: <https://www.protectmyministry.com/>
Background Checks and Screening

Choice Screening: <https://www.choicescreening.com/>
Background Checks and Screening