



SEXUAL MISCONDUCT HANDBOOK

[Last Updated: December 5, 2025]

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INTRODUCTION

Protecting our churches from child sexual abuse and responding to survivors with compassion and integrity are among our most serious and sacred responsibilities as pastors. Though we pray such situations are rare, when they do arise, pastors need immediate, reliable guidance they can trust.

This handbook is designed by the Response Committee for Sexual Misconduct (RCSM) to serve as a companion resource to the training required by our Book of Church Order (BCO). It is not a substitute for that training. Rather, it provides essential principles and practical tools to help pastors respond in ways that are wise, compassionate, and God-honoring—especially in moments of urgent need. Consider asking each member of your eldership and safety team to read through this handbook

This handbook begins with the Sovereign Grace Statement on Child Sexual abuse which states our commitment to this most important subject. It includes key information such as listing the forms of sexual misconduct as well as reporting requirements and processes. In a circumstance where a report to law enforcement or child protection agencies is required by law, this handbook describes best practices and appropriate actions.

In addition to the training and guidance provided here, we strongly encourage every church to review their state's child abuse reporting laws and requirements annually and complete the "My States Reporting Requirements Worksheet" on page 28. Legal obligations can vary significantly by state and may change over time. Staying informed ensures that your church remains both legally compliant and faithfully responsive in protecting children and supporting survivors.



Resources

Sovereign Grace Statement on Child Sexual Abuse

Background

Child sexual abuse is a terrible reality in our fallen world. Sexual abuse in any form is grieving, because abuse is committed against people made in the image of God. Therefore, it constitutes a sin against God himself. Child sexual abuse is widespread in our world today, with as many as 1¹ in 5 women and 1 in 10 men worldwide reporting having been sexually abused as children. Further, child sexual abuse survivors often bear this heavy burden alone, dealing with the effects of sexual abuse for the rest of their lives.

The prevalence of sexual abuse means that churches are not exempt from the reality of sexual abuse among us, and survivors of abuse are an important part of our lives and our churches. As a family of churches, we must be prepared to minister to survivors of abuse in a manner that honors Christ and promotes justice, and to protect children to the best of our ability.

Biblical Basis for Our Response

The gospel of Jesus and the example of our Savior must shape our response to the reality of child sexual abuse. The church and its shepherds are charged with imitating the Chief Shepherd in these attributes:

Compassion: As a compassionate and loving Savior, Christ grieves at the effects of sin, and our churches should grieve with anyone who has been sinned against as a victim of abuse (Romans 12:15).

Justice: As a just ruler, Christ hears the cries of the oppressed (Exodus 22:21–24) and delegates authority to government to punish evildoers and promote righteousness (Romans 13:4). We must cooperate with God-given governmental authorities for the promotion of justice.

Healing: As the great Redeemer, Christ heals the terrible effects of sin (Isaiah 53:4–5) and will one day wipe away every tear through his plan to restore all things in him (Rev 21:4). Our churches are called to be places where every survivor of abuse finds hope on a path toward healing in this life, even as they look forward to the complete restoration and redemption of all things.

Protection: As head of the church, Christ uses his strength to protect his flock (Isaiah 40:10–11). We must strive to be a place of safety for children and abuse survivors alike.

¹
Child Maltreatment Fact Sheet. World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs150/en/>. Updated January 2014.

Affirmations:

Given the prevalence of child sexual abuse and our Savior's example, we affirm these convictions as a union of churches:

Compassion

- We affirm that our churches must be places of compassion and love for survivors of abuse, thereby imitating our compassionate Savior.

Justice

- We affirm that anyone aware of child sexual abuse or allegations of abuse—whether occurring inside or outside the church—must report such abuse or allegations to duly appointed, God-ordained civil authorities. We exhort each of our churches to make all members aware of this responsibility before God to defend the oppressed and punish evildoers. We believe this course of action fulfills legal and moral responsibilities to protect children, thereby promoting justice that honors Christ.
- We affirm that our churches must proactively cooperate with all law enforcement efforts to bring perpetrators of abuse to justice, thereby protecting children and promoting justice that honors Christ.

Healing

- We affirm that our church leaders must give special attention to the care of victims of sexual abuse. In this care, we desire to point abuse survivors to the ultimate restoration found in Christ and the ultimate hope of God's perfect justice. While they long for God's perfect justice, survivors of sexual abuse need our enduring compassionate care as they wait for due process to establish earthly justice, knowing that earthly justice may be delayed or even denied in this fallen world. Each of our churches should seek to counsel abuse survivors with sensitivity, skill, and compassion, taking advantage of opportunities to use resources or counselors with special training in the area of child sexual abuse.

Protection

- We affirm that our churches must maintain robust child protection policies, implementing effective safety systems designed to protect children or youth, thereby striving to protect children involved in church programs as Christ protects the church.

With the affirmation of these convictions, we urge our churches to the faithful fulfillment of this task, conscious that at the final judgment, each one's work will be tested and each will answer to Christ. While our churches are diverse and distinct, we stand united in seeking to proactively protect children from sexual abuse. May our efforts be aided by God's grace and undertaken for his glory.

THE ROLE OF THE RCSM

Every pastor desires to see the people of God flourishing in their knowledge of and relationship with Jesus Christ. Yet we minister in a fallen world, and few realities expose its brokenness more grievously than sexual abuse. For this reason, the Response Committee for Sexual Misconduct (RCSM) exists. Our role is to assist pastors in shepherding those affected by abuse. From ensuring that churches are prepared to respond when abuse occurs to equipping them to care for all involved, the RCSM seeks to serve pastors as they faithfully serve the church of Christ.

The Response Committee for Sexual Misconduct was formed by the Sovereign Grace Council of Elders and tasked in (BCO-10.2.1) with the following purpose:

1. To ensure that sexual misconduct accusations are reported to civil authorities as appropriate.
2. To help local churches ensure the victims of sexual misconduct are protected, cared for, and supported.
3. To ensure due process is followed for local churches and elders within Sovereign Grace Churches in compliance with the Book of Church Order.
4. To provide resources to local churches and victims of sexual misconduct.

To accomplish these purposes, the RCSM has been given the following responsibilities in (BCO 10.2.5):

1. To keep current on its training to carry out its purpose.
2. The Response Committee for Sexual Misconduct is free to retain outside counsel (elders and non-elders, members and nonmembers, men and women) at its discretion. It also may establish advisory teams or recommend others to assist in providing support and resources to victims of sexual misconduct and to local churches.
3. To provide nonbinding counsel as a resource to the churches of Sovereign Grace.
4. To monitor the process in local churches of any accusations or suspicions of sexual misconduct of a local elder.
5. Local churches are voluntarily able to request counsel from the Response Committee for Sexual Misconduct in matters relating to local situations involving sexual misconduct reporting, care, and support for survivors.
6. To maintain its policies and procedures as well as how the churches of Sovereign Grace can engage and communicate with the committee.

RCSM COMMITTEE MEMBER CONTACT INFORMATION

The members of the RCSM committee are assigned coverage regions to distribute the workload and help assure availability. Contact the member of the RCSM assigned to your region. If you have not heard a reply within 24 hours, or if your situation is critical contact the chairman of the committee. If the chairman is unavailable, any member of the Response Committee for Sexual Misconduct may be contacted.

Coverage Region(s)	Committee Member	Email	Phone
Northeast Mi-Atlantic	Kyle Huber	kylehuber@greentree.org	(609) 350-3180
Midsouth	Marty Machowski	mmachowski@covfel.org	(610)-505-9022
East Central Lower Great Lakes	Bert Turner	bert.turner@cogc.org	(330) 618-2294
Southeast South Central	Keith Bunting	keith@risenlifechurch.org	(850) 420-9966
Midwest Northwest	Loren VenHuizen	loren@emmausroadsf.com	(605) 261-0944
West	Derek Overstreet (Chairman)	derek@sovgracetucson.org	(520) 403-1948

DEFINING IMPORTANT TERMS

Identifying and addressing sexual misconduct starts with clearly defined language, creating clarity and a common vocabulary surrounding this important topic. Some words have legal significance beyond common use: abuse, harassment and assault, for example, are often used interchangeably. Because precision is important, consider the following terms related to sexual misconduct and their distinctions.

Forms of Sexual Misconduct include:

1. **Child Sexual Abuse:** Inappropriate sexual behavior with a child, perpetrated by an adult
2. **Peer-to-Peer Sexual Abuse:** Inappropriate sexual behavior occurring between children or minors
3. **Sexual Assault:** Nonconsensual sexual behavior occurring between adults (often characterized by force, threat or violence)
4. **Sexual Harassment:** Inappropriate sexual behavior between adults in the workplace (not necessarily characterized by force or violence)

Note: 1 and 2 above involve injury to a child; 3 and 4 involve injury to an adult.

THE PASTOR'S BCO RESPONSIBILITIES

The following is the responsibility of every Sovereign Grace pastor as noted in our BCO.

Reporting the Sexual Abuse of a Child (or minor under 18 years of age) (BCO 5.4).

Sovereign Grace churches and their elders have a moral obligation to protect children.

While reporting requirements related to child abuse vary from state to state, a Sovereign Grace elder who, in the course of his ministry involvement in a Sovereign Grace church, has cause to believe that a child is the victim of sexual abuse, then he must report such abuse to the appropriate child protection or law enforcement authorities.

This obligation exists whether the incident occurs outside or inside the church or ministry. (Example of an 'outside' incident: a child or teen reports that he or she has been sexually abused by a family member or friend. Example of an 'inside' incident: a child or teen reports that he or she has been sexually abused by a church staff member or volunteer.)

In addition, if a Sovereign Grace elder has cause to believe from an adult who was a victim of sexual abuse as a child that another child is currently at risk for sexual abuse by the same perpetrator, then the elder must notify the appropriate child protection or law enforcement authorities.

By this we hope to protect children and promote justice in all our churches.

Ensuring your church performs criminal background checks (BCO 5.1.3)

Local churches must complete a criminal background check for all elders, employees, and adult volunteers working with minors. These must be renewed every five years at a minimum. Additionally, when a church transfers from one region to another region, the local church must complete new background checks for the transferring elders (BCO 2.8.7.1 and BCO 6.2.4)

Ensuring your church provides sexual abuse awareness training (BCO 5.4)

Each Sovereign Grace church must train church staff members and children's ministry workers to promote sexual abuse awareness and the safety of children involved in ministry programs and is solely responsible for the content and participation in such training.

Contacting the RCSM

When an allegation or suspicion of abuse does occur, you are *required* to contact the RCSM in the following situations:

1. When an elder or former elder is accused of, or criminally charged with sexual misconduct. (BCO 10.2.3.a)
2. When a church employee or volunteer working with minors is accused of, or criminally charged with sexual misconduct. (BCO 10.2.3.b)
3. When an elder or former elder is accused of mishandling a case of sexual misconduct. (BCO 10.2.3.c)

You are *invited* to engage the RCSM in the following situations:

1. When a church member / attender or their child is accused of or criminally charged with sexual misconduct. (BCO 10.2.3.2.a)
2. When a church member / attender or their child alleges sexual misconduct. (BCO 10.2.3.2.b)

Other BCO sections addressing abuse

BCO 17.3.1 – In cases involving sexual misconduct accusations, a local elder or any member in good standing of a Sovereign Grace Church may take up the case of a Plaintiff should the original Plaintiff withdraw his/her membership from the church.

BCO 17.3.3 – In the event that an elder is charged with sexual misconduct, the local elders must also immediately engage the Chair of the Response Committee for Sexual Misconduct. The Moderator of Just Cause will also immediately contact the same Chairman (1) to confirm that the Response Committee for Sexual Misconduct has been engaged and (2) to receive their counsel during the pretrial procedures (BCO-17.5)

BCO 17.3.5.3 – Consideration and Care for Witnesses

In some cases, the witness or individual bringing forward a charge has been wronged or is in a vulnerable position. Local elders have a responsibility to provide appropriate care for such an individual, to protect them from potential intimidation, etc.

BCO 17.3.6

The two-year limitation (to file charges) will be waived if the charge concerns criminal behavior or sexual misconduct. The two-year limitation may be waived if the charge concerns negligence in handling sexual misconduct cases should sufficient evidence of negligence be supplied to the Moderator of Just Cause.

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT REPORTING GUIDE

This guide is intended to serve Sovereign Grace Churches in pastoral situations involving sexual misconduct. This is not a comprehensive guide, but a checklist for the first steps of navigating pastoral situations involving sexual misconduct. It is our recommendation that your local church consider legal counsel in addition to what is listed below. The RCSM remains available to provide counsel or help in determining the need for legal counsel.

STEP 1 Report the Sexual Misconduct to the appropriate authorities.

If the appropriate authority has not been contacted, then contact immediately

Date contacted: _____

Case/File # _____

Ask for any special recommendations they would give to you for right now:

STEP 2 Does the incident require engaging the RCSM?

When any of the following occur, you are required to engage the Review Committee for Sexual Misconduct (RCSM):

1. When an elder or former elder is accused of, or criminally charged with sexual misconduct. (BCO 10.2.3.a)
2. When a church employee or volunteer working with minors is accused of, or criminally charged with sexual misconduct. (BCO 10.2.3.b)
3. When an elder or former elder is accused of mishandling a case of sexual misconduct. (BCO 10.2.3.c)

If "Yes" complete this form in its entirety.

If "No" you may still contact the RCSM (BCO 10.2.3.2)

Date RCSM was Contacted: _____

Date Formal Email to the Chair was sent
[RCSM@sovereigngrace.com]: _____

What special recommendations did the RCSM give you

STEP 3 Contact the Chairman of the Regional Judicial Review Committee

Date Contacted: _____

What special recommendations did the Chairman of the Regional JRC give you?

STEP 4 Contact Regional Leader

Date Contacted: _____

What special recommendations did the regional leader give you?

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN OFF SITE

Guiding principle: Church leadership should not implement a program or ministry in the church, that includes childcare, that it is unable to supervise.

The RCSM provides the following recommendations:

Small Group Recommendations

Small groups are a common and vital ministry in Sovereign Grace Churches. This means that our elders must provide leadership that spiritually serves each group while also bringing leadership to the area of childcare in small group ministries so that our church families and guests of all ages would be cared for and well-protected.¹

Best Practice Options

1. Families find their own childcare in their own home.
2. If childcare is to be provided at any small group function, appropriate Children’s Ministry policies need to apply, including for instance:
 - a. Utilize the two approved ADULT worker rule for those caring for children in small group ministry.²
 - b. Absolutely NO minors (including older siblings) looking after smaller children (except as helpers to the two approved adult workers).³
 - c. Observable, well-lit spaces should always be used.
3. Where possible, Small Groups all meet at the church, providing childcare with full Children’s Ministry policies in place.
4. Where possible, Small Groups meet off-site but provide “drop-off” childcare at the church with full Children’s Ministry policies in place.

¹ Informal group babysitting is not an appropriate solution. Since small groups are church functions, a “small group schedule” in which some families babysit all the kids in the care group during the discussion should not be created. Though convenient, this strategy blurs the line between formal, church childcare and personal babysitting and opens the door to functional dangers to both children and the church. While families might be “okay” with lesser options, it is prudent, protective, and caring to provide the safest environment possible.

² See the [5-Part Safety System](#) for more information.

³ The Department of Justice reports that over 1/3 of the cases of sexual misconduct occur peer-to-peer and stories of families that “didn’t believe it could happen in their situation” are plentiful. (<https://ministrysafe.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ChurchExecutiveChapter9SexualAbuseSeriesEBook11January2021.pdf>)

Missions Trip Recommendations

Mission trips are wonderful opportunities for gospel ministry and partnership. As Pastors, we must exercise wisdom and oversight in ways that protect, guard, and serve everyone involved. There can be unique elements that exist on a mission trip that we need to take into account. Such as differences in laws, culture, awareness, and expectations that impact how we guard against sexual misconduct. We may have less control over policies, procedures, and facilities.

Part of how we represent Christ on mission trips is how we are intentional in protecting our teams and those we travel to serve. These recommendations are for when you are taking youth, or if you will be working with youth or children.

Best Practices

1. Carefully screen all adult team members. When a team member is from another church, verify that all individuals have been similarly screened and approved by their sending church.
2. Have all members go through the MinistrySafe awareness training.
3. Have all leaders and adults go through a background check.
4. Use applications similar to children's ministry that uncover potential struggle areas. Require recommendations from a pastor, small group or other ministry leader.
5. Have clear policies and expectations about behavior for leaders, chaperones, and team members.
6. Designate leaders /chaperones to watch the MinistrySafe Peer to Peer Abuse video (one hour) in order to create team awareness on this significant category of sexual abuse.
7. Communicate that trip policies begin the moment the team assembles for travel until the moment they leave the team for home.
8. Communicate your team policies with your mission partners and acquire their policies that you might minimize risks during your trip.
9. Be aware of the high-risk areas and behaviors where additional policies are necessary:

Bathrooms and areas where clothing is changed

Overnight / sleeping arrangements

Places that are off limits (hidden places that cannot be observed)

Water activities (where body parts and interactions are not directly visible)

Individuals isolating from the team

Leaders, team members or youth pairing off with youth of the opposite sex.

10. Include clarity about consequences for violations in your policy. When these violations include clear sexual misconduct, make clear beforehand that parents and appropriate authorities will be informed.

Off Site Event Recommendations

The following recommendations can be applied to all church gatherings that involve children outside your normal in building childcare such as youth camp, youth retreats and VBS.

Best Practices

1. Know the state law related to youth camps/retreats for where you meet. For example, the state of Texas requires that all adults undergo awareness screening and background checks.
2. All attending parents, leaders, and volunteers should be required to go through the MinistrySafe awareness training and peer sexual abuse training.
3. All attending parents, leaders, and volunteers should be required to obtain a criminal background check.
4. Prior to any youth or children's event: Provide to all attending, documentation that lists the specific supervision of each student and an additional document that clearly defines the responsibilities and expectations of supervision.
5. Be aware of the high-risk areas and behaviors where additional policies are necessary:

Bathrooms and areas where clothing is changed

Overnight / sleeping arrangements

Places that are off limits (hidden places that cannot be observed)

Water activities (where body parts and interactions are not directly visible)

Individuals isolating from the team



Resources

OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH MINISTRY SAFE

We cannot overstate the profound benefit MinistrySafe continually provides to Sovereign Grace Churches. Through their generosity and shared commitment to protecting the vulnerable, they have partnered with Sovereign Grace Churches to make robust, gospel-informed training accessible at no cost to your church. As members of the Response Committee for Sexual Misconduct, we highly recommend their training to you without reservation. We would love to see all Sovereign Grace Churches benefitting from the use of MinistrySafe.

MinistrySafe offers the highest standard of training and support in the prevention and response to child sexual abuse. The majority of the material included has been provided by MinistrySafe and adapted for use by our churches.

This handbook includes a curated selection of their resources to supplement—not replace—the required training outlined in the BCO. We encourage every church to fully engage with both the training and this companion guide as part of our shared commitment to faithful and proactive care

**To Contact MinistrySafe
Phone: 817-737-SAFE (7233)**

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CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: FACTS AND STATISTICS

Sexual Misconduct harmful to children typically occurs in two forms: Child Sexual Abuse and Peer-to-Peer Sexual Abuse

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (CSA)

DEFINITION (Simplified)

Child Sexual Abuse: Any tricked, forced, manipulated or coerced sexual activity for the pleasure of the abuser.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE FACTS

These statistics provide a framework for the Handbook processes that follow.

In the United States:

- 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 6 boys will be sexually abused before reaching 18 years of age.
- More than 90% of child victims are victimized by someone they *know and trust*.
- 2 out of 3 sexual abuse survivors do not disclose until adulthood, *if ever*.
- These statistics are applicable to all demographics, socioeconomic statuses, ethnicities and denominations.
- Perpetrators *groom* children for inappropriate sexual interaction or touch.
- Perpetrators *groom the gatekeepers* to believe they are helpful, responsible and trustworthy individuals.
- *Preferential* offenders have an *age and gender of preference* for sexual interaction with children.
- For the *convicted* male offender, recidivism is rampant, reaching 50-150 victims prior to criminal prosecution.
- In the convicted male population, the *age of first offense* is 13-14 years of age, on average.
- Less than 10% of abusers will encounter the criminal justice system in any form, *ever*.
- *False allegations of Child Sexual Abuse are RARE.*

PEER-TO-PEER SEXUAL ABUSE FACTS AND REALITIES

DEFINITION (Simplified)

Peer-to-Peer Sexual Abuse: Sexually harmful behavior between children involving an *aggressor* and a child who does not seek out or want the sexual interaction.

FACTS

- 1 out of 3 reports of sexual abuse are perpetrated by another child.
- Children as young as 4 or 5 may engage in harmful sexual behaviors.
- For the *aggressor*: the highest rate of offense occurs from 12-14 years of age.
- 7 out of 8 reported juvenile sex offenders are over 12 years of age.
- 93% of reported juvenile sex offenders are *male*.

REALITIES TO KEEP IN MIND

- *All* non-consensual sexual touch is a *crime*.
- Peer-to-Peer sexual abuse must be reported under most state legal reporting statutes.
- The age of consent for sexual interaction is 17 in some states, but *age of consent* is irrelevant in circumstances characterized by a significant *imbalance of power* (*age, size, authority, position, dependence, etc.*).

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION

AN EFFECTIVE SAFETY SYSTEM

Reporting child abuse and neglect is *one* element in a ministry's child protection efforts. Reporting *alone* is not enough; each ministry must implement a plan to *prevent* Child Sexual Abuse.

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse begins at the *ministry level*: every church should work proactively to *prevent* and *respond well* to Child Sexual Abuse. Prevention begins with the implementation of an effective *Safety System*. MinistrySafe provides all elements of an effective Safety System and an online framework for managing each element. Learn more about MinistrySafe's online resources and the implementation of a Safety System in the *MinistrySafe – Getting Started Guide* (See **Appendix 2**).

THE OFFENDER'S GROOMING PROCESS

In developing an effective Safety System, ministries are building a fence: a protective device meant to keep out an unwanted intruder, and the *type* of fence is driven by the type of intruder. Accordingly, an understanding of offender behavior and characteristics is key. When ministry leaders understand offender *behavior*, the Church is able to design and construct effective barriers.

When a ministry gathers children, it becomes an attractive target for the *preferential offender*, who prefers a child as a sexual partner, generally targeting a child within his or her *age range and gender of preference*.

We cannot recognize this risk visually . . .
We must recognize this risk behaviorally.
This behavior is known as "***the grooming process.***"

Sadly, it's not possible to recognize the preferential offender *visually*; offenders have no visual profile. Instead, ministry leaders must recognize the risk *behaviorally* – *the grooming process*. The grooming process of the preferential offender includes two key elements: ***grooming the child*** and ***grooming the gatekeepers***.

The targeted child is *groomed* for inappropriate sexual interaction, while *gatekeepers* (parents, ministry leaders and co-workers) are groomed into a belief that the offender is a helpful, responsible, and trustworthy individual. Remember, all abusers are creating opportunities for *trusted time alone* with a targeted child.

Validated by decades of academic studies, the grooming process of the abuser is *known* and *recognizable*, and includes the following steps:

- Gaining access to children within an *age and gender of preference*;
- Selecting a specific child (or children);
- Introducing nudity and sexual touch; and
- Keeping the child *silent*.

ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE SAFETY SYSTEM

An Effective Safety System includes following elements: Each of these elements play a role in a system; no one element serves as a stand-alone safety protocol.

- Sexual Abuse Awareness Training
- Skillful Screening Processes (and Training)
- Appropriate Background Check
- Tailored Policies & Procedures
- Systems for Monitoring and Oversight

Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

Sexual Abuse Awareness Training forms the foundation of an effective Safety System, because ministry leaders cannot address a risk they do not understand, and *what we believe shapes what we DO*. Prevention starts with awareness.

Awareness Training equips ministry staff members and volunteers with a better understanding of abuser characteristics, the abuser's *grooming process* and *common grooming behaviors*—giving workers *eyes to see* abuser characteristics and behaviors.

Training topics include:

- Facts and Misconceptions
- Characteristics of an Abuser
- Grooming Process
- Peer-to-Peer Abuse

- Risk Reduction & Prevention
- If a Child Reports
- Impact on Children
- Reporting Requirements

Further, *what we believe shapes what we SAY*. When staff members and volunteers are trained to recognize grooming behaviors, all are better equipped to receive and report allegations and suspicions of abuse, both internally and to appropriate civil authorities.

What we BELIEVE shapes what we DO.
 What we BELIEVE shapes what we SAY

Skillful Screening

The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Screening is the process by which ministry leaders gather information about an applicant’s past behavior to better predict future behavior. An effective ministry screening process should include the following elements for paid staff positions *and* volunteers: application, reference checks, background check and an interview.

Commonly, ministries screen applicants for fitness of purpose – gathering information about an applicant’s past behavior to determine whether the applicant has the skills, abilities and education to fill a particular role. For example, if a Christian school desires to hire a Greek teacher, it’s important to gather information to determine whether the applicant has mastered Greek and can effectively teach it. In this example, the school’s purpose for screening was related to fitness of purpose (teaching Greek), *not child safety*.

Screening for child safety requires the gathering of information concerning an applicant’s past behavior to determine whether the applicant has ‘wolf-like qualities’. Where child safety is concerned, an effective screening process includes questions designed to elicit high-risk indicators of the preferential offender (male and female).

Every applicant – paid or unpaid – should be screened before he or she may enter the *sheep pen*, gaining access to children. The goal: *keep the wolf out of the sheep pen* – recognizing wolf-like qualities *before* allowing access to children. Unfortunately, many ministries are not screening effectively, and some churches are not screening *at all*. Training and resources related to effective screening are

available through MinistrySafe; see *The MinistrySafe System – Getting Started* (See **Appendix 2**).

Background Checks

Most ministries require background checks in some form. For many, background checks are the church’s sole screening method, because ministry leaders lack an understanding of the criminal justice system and known *limitations* of the background check.

We must perform background checks
But background checks cannot be the **only** thing we do.

Consider this statistic: Less than 10% of sexual abusers will encounter the criminal justice system, *ever*.

Given this reality, if a ministry’s background check system is working *perfectly* (which is unlikely), more than 90% of individuals who have sexually abused children have no past criminal record ... *and know it*. Making a reasonable effort to access past criminal history has become a standard of care, but background checks cannot serve as a stand-alone safety system.

Background checks *can* be a helpful tool when used effectively. For each staff member or volunteer, the depth of background check should be determined by the degree of trust conferred by *position*, or extent of direct contact with children. In addition, background checks should be periodically refreshed. As well, ministry leaders should become conversant with high-risk indicators revealed by the background check process, including plea-down offenses, stair-step offenses and grooming offenses.

Tailored Policies & Procedures

Policies and Procedures are the written expression of permissible and impermissible behavior within the ministry program. Effective policies should be tailored to the type of ministry program and population served, and shaped around an understanding of the abuser’s *grooming process*, *abuser characteristics* and *common grooming behaviors*.

Through Awareness Training, staff members and volunteers are trained to better understand the *purpose* of policies, therefore serving more effectively within policy boundaries, and recognizing problematic behaviors *before* inappropriate sexual interaction occurs. As well, when policy ‘bright lines’ are clearly communicated – *this* is appropriate, *this* is *NOT* – staff members and volunteers

are more likely to notice when someone steps *over* the ‘bright line’. Written policy should present clear guidelines concerning appropriate touch, talk, boundaries, social media, bathroom use, one-to-one interaction, overnight stays and reporting requirements.

One purpose of policies is to provide a written expression of what IS and IS NOT appropriate behavior within a particular program. Because the grooming process will vary, policies will vary – depending on the type of program (i.e., children’s ministry vs. student ministry) or the age and gender of children served. As a result, all policies will address grooming, but there may be policy variations for different ministry programs.

Sample policy forms (i.e., Children’s Ministry Policy, Student Ministry Policy, Camp Policy, etc.) can be accessed through a MinistrySafe membership.

Systems for Monitoring and Oversight

For any Safety System to remain effective, systems for monitoring and oversight must be in place, ensuring that *you DO what you SAY you do* in a consistent manner.

A periodic review of safety system elements is necessary to maintain consistency:

- Does the System still fit the ministry?
- Are adequate methods of accountability in place?
- Is the ministry able to archive evidence of Safety System compliance?

Ministry leaders must evaluate new programs for child protection issues, monitor changes in reporting requirements, address the ongoing need for policy updates, and include child protection compliance in employee performance evaluations. Periodic review ensures that child protection is not jeopardized by the departure of one or two key staff members or volunteers.

To learn more about MinistrySafe’s online Control Panel and Systems for Monitoring and Oversight, visit MinistrySafe.com .

Safety Committee

The Safety Committee is a group of individuals responsible for addressing all areas of child protection in an ongoing manner, ensuring that Safety System elements are implemented consistently.

It is imperative that the Safety Committee be empowered and authorized by church polity to ACT where child protection issues are concerned.

Serving on the Church Safety Committee

The Safety Committee should consist of at *least* three individuals, such that child protection issues or allegations do not ‘bottleneck’ with one or two people. More than nine individuals may become unwieldy, where scheduling issues are concerned.

Best practice: Require completion of sexual abuse awareness training and skillful screening training for the children’s minister, student ministry pastor, the chair of the safety committee and the executive pastor.

Recommended safety committee members include:

- Executive Pastor
- Children’s Minister
- Student Ministry Pastor
- Any Pastor overseeing any other child-serving program
- Designated Elder or Deacon (representing the Elder Board or Deacons)
- Church members who are Licensed Mental Health Professionals and includes both a male and a female

Safety committee meetings

Initially, the committee should meet monthly. After six monthly meetings, the committee may elect to meet quarterly. In addition to regular meetings, the Safety Committee should meet immediately following any significant incident related to child protection to discuss the incident, action steps, and any need for policy modification.

Topics to be Discussed (Initial Six Months)

- Creating the Sexual Abuse Response Plan
- Creating a proposed budget for child protection
- Church adherence to child protection policies and adopted practices
- Any issues arising from specific child-serving programs
- Potential problem areas or programs

- Screening protocols, including timelines, for employees and volunteers
- Keeping a comprehensive list of ALL church programs serving minors
- Trauma-informed care

All child protection issues should be addressed by the Safety Committee. No ministry program should be authorized to initiate services to children or youth without first vetting the proposed services through the Safety Committee.

Every five years, the Safety Committee should complete an assessment of all services offered to children or youth, evaluating child protection in each program, including:

- Unscheduled drop-in supervision
- Discussion with program leaders
- Discussion with child protection experts
- Review of performance evaluations in key positions

All suspicions or allegations of child abuse or neglect communicated to or arising out of church programs should be reported to a member of the Safety Committee. ***Failure to report to the Safety Committee by a church employee should be deemed a violation of ministry policy which may lead to termination.***

Best Practice: Should a suspicion or allegation of Child Sexual Abuse be received by ANY committee member, the committee chair must be notified the same business day, but in any case, within 24 hours, such that no member of the committee becomes a bottleneck related to the allegation or information.

Any failure to comply with this requirement should be deemed a violation of ministry policy which may lead to termination.

When an allegation or suspicion of abuse arises, the committee will act to report the allegation if the circumstance, outcry or allegation was not previously reported to child protection agencies or law enforcement. After this report has occurred, the Safety Committee will take appropriate action to safeguard other children and implement elements of the Sexual Abuse Response Plan. When needed, the Safety Committee (or its designee) will retain legal counsel concerning reporting requirements and appropriate action in all child protection contexts.

CONCLUSION

Sexual abusers move to where the barriers to entry are lowest or nonexistent: too often, the Church. When ministry leaders understand the risk presented by the preferential offender, an effective Safety System may be put in place, proactively protecting children from sexual abuse.

COMMUNICATION PLAN

Every ministry should have a communication plan – both *internal* and *external*.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Every ministry should have a clearly communicated plan identifying issues that *must* be shared with other ministry leaders – particularly when the issue may involve injury of a child or adult. If the issue requires a report to law enforcement or child protection authorities, the ministry should follow a well-defined communication plan (See **Appendix 1: Child Sexual Abuse Response Plan**). Not all matters, however, require a report to authorities (i.e., policy violations, unusual or problematic behaviors).

Every staff member within the ministry should understand the pathways of communication to freely express or describe issues or circumstances for evaluation and possible response by ministry leaders. Open communication avoids this breakdown: “I saw unusual behavior, but I didn’t know who to tell.”

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Some issues or circumstances must be communicated *outside* the ministry’s internal communication pathways, including suspicions or allegations of child abuse or neglect. Some issues may require communication to families, the congregation and/or an insurance carrier, depending on the facts. Every ministry should create an external communication plan *before* the plan is needed.

(See **Appendix 1: Child Sexual Abuse Response Plan**.)

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

REPORTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Every church or ministry will encounter sexual abuse issues, whether in the form of allegations from within the ministry or from a child's *core world* or *home environment*. Where suspicions or allegations of abuse are concerned, every ministry should create a Child Sexual Abuse Response Plan (See **Appendix 1**).

Every ministry's Response Plan should include *abuse reporting policies* complying with the mandatory reporting requirements of the respective state.

Note: Child Sexual Abuse (perpetrated by an adult) and Peer-to-Peer Sexual Abuse (perpetrated by another child) are reportable events – *both involve sexual abuse of a child*.

CHANGES IN THE LAW

Legal reporting requirements change constantly; ministry leaders must stay abreast of state and federal changes in the law.

MY STATE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS WORKSHEET

Each church should research the child abuse reporting laws & requirements specific to their state.

Important Information (Fill in Completely)

Statewide Reporting Hotline Number _____

Online Reporting Website _____

Mandatory Reporters (Who is a mandated reporter in your state?)

How to Make a Report

Immunity (if any)

Failure to Report

ADDITIONAL REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

OVERVIEW

Beyond reporting to relevant authorities, some circumstances may require additional reporting and communication.

NOTIFYING YOUR INSURANCE CARRIER

State child abuse reporting laws vary. These laws will describe who is required to report allegations or suspicions of child abuse or neglect and how. In many situations, failure to report child abuse and neglect is a CRIME. Reporting this information to a ministry's insurance carrier is a contractual obligation, rather than an obligation under state law; failure to do so may have contractual consequences affecting a ministry's insurance coverage.

POLICY NOTICE PROVISION

Every ministry should purchase appropriate insurance coverage, including coverage related to Sexual Abuse and Molestation (SAM Coverage) or Sexual Misconduct Coverage. Every insurance policy contains a 'notice' requirement similar to this:

In the event the insured [ministry] receives information concerning facts that could give rise to a claim, the insured is required under this policy to notify the insurance carrier immediately, but not later than 24 hours after receipt of this information.

If a circumstance related to sexual abuse includes a fact pattern which *could* give rise to a claim (lawsuit) against the church or ministry, this notice provision requires the ministry to notify its insurance carrier. (*Clearly a report to authorities should have already occurred.*)

FAILURE TO NOTIFY CARRIER

Failure to notify the carrier in this circumstance can result in a 'reservation of rights' or denial of coverage by the carrier. Either scenario places the ministry in an adversarial position with its insurance carrier; not a desirable status while navigating a crisis.

NOTIFYING PARENTS, CONGREGATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

Though not legally required or contractually mandated, notifying parents, members of the congregation and ministry stakeholders is imperative, particularly if the alleged abuser was a ministry staff member, volunteer or lay leader. *What* to communicate and *to whom* is driven by the specific fact pattern. See the Sexual Abuse Response Plan (See **Appendix 1**) for guidance related to these communications.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO REPORTING

OVERVIEW

Every state in the United States has mandatory reporting requirements decreed by state law: when a mandatory reporter gains knowledge of or suspects abuse or neglect of a child, that individual is required to report to designated authorities. The consistent message from state and federal lawmakers, child advocacy organizations, insurance organizations and risk managers is this: *when in doubt, REPORT.*

Regardless of clear legal requirements mandating the report of child abuse and neglect – and the reality that *failure to report* is a crime – *ministry leaders continue to struggle with this obligation.* To avoid the common pitfalls, ministry leaders must understand common misconceptions about sexual abuse and sexual abusers that lead to failure to report. By replacing misconceptions with factual information, ministries can avoid these failures, providing a clear pathway for a *correct response* that may feel or seem counterintuitive. Listed below are the most common obstacles to reporting.

“WHAT IF I AM WRONG?”

Many individuals struggle with the thought: *What if I’m wrong?* What if I make this report, impact this person’s life, and I’m *wrong?*

Hesitation in reporting Child Sexual Abuse is common, particularly in circumstances where ministry staff members or leaders lack an understanding of sexual abuse, sexual abusers, legal requirements and ramifications to the victim. When sexual abuse is alleged or reasonably suspected, leaders know the next step may have significant consequences – for the ministry, for the child and for the alleged bad actor/abuser.

At this juncture, too often the focus of ministry leaders is on the alleged bad actor:

- “If I call authorities, it can ruin this employee’s career, marriage, reputation...”
- “This child is accusing someone I know...I cannot imagine him doing this.”
- “When I asked her about it, she denied any inappropriate touch.”
- “This is simply what the child said...and I have no proof.
- “This child may be making this up – should I believe a trusted staff member or a *child?*”

Here’s the reality – Many state legislatures have created very broad reporting obligations and require that all allegations and reasonable suspicions of abuse be reported, demonstrating the

safety and welfare of the child outweigh any inconvenience to an adult (or another child, in Peer-to-Peer sexual abuse scenarios.

Reporting Principle: The safety and welfare of the child
outweighs any inconvenience to an adult

In addition, when an adult or older child is the subject of a report to authorities, the alleged bad actor has *significant* due process and legal rights in any investigative process and criminal prosecution. When *no* report is made, the child victim receives *no due process*.

Worse, the child joins thousands of abuse survivors who draw damaging conclusions from the experience, including:

- “No one believes me.”
- “They believe my abuser instead of me.”
- “There is no point in speaking out; I will never be believed.”
- “Somehow, it was my fault.”
- “I was powerless to stop it, and will be powerless to stop it in the future.”
- “There is no justice here for me, or others.”
- “This is not a safe place for me.”

At this point, ministry leaders are at a crossroad: *make a report or not*. When a report is made, the accused adult (or older child) may engage in the process to prevent injustice. When the report is *not* made, the child may continue to experience abuse...*and additional trauma from the silence of those who failed to report*.

FEAR OF FALSE ALLEGATIONS

One of the most unfortunate reasons for failure to report is the fear of reporting a *false allegation*, thereby creating hardship for the individual accused. This fear is pervasive, notwithstanding mandatory reporting requirements, and has great likelihood of causing further damage to an abuse victim. In reality, false allegations are RARE; in general, children don't fabricate or 'make up' allegations of sexual abuse.

False allegations of child sexual abuse are **rare**: less than 3%
(Center for Disease Control)

The majority of allegations determined to be false are *made by adults* on a child's behalf in the context of divorce and custody disputes. When an allegation is communicated by the child – *even if subsequently recanted in an effort to please family members or others* – more than 98% of allegations are factual. In most circumstances, a child's outcry provides only a fraction of the actual abusive experience. In general, *children don't fabricate an allegation*.

The point is this: *the great majority of abuse allegations are factual and should be taken as truth*. Not only should the child be believed, it can generally be assumed that the child has endured *more* abusive behavior than what has been communicated. Further, state and federal reporting requirements do not require *proof* or *corroboration*; the reporting requirement is triggered by *receiving an allegation* or forming a *reasonable suspicion* of abuse or neglect.

LEGISLATIVE BALANCE: PROTECT THE CHILD

Clearly, reporting requirements were intentionally crafted to initiate communication with a low threshold of information – even if an alleged bad actor is inconvenienced by the report. This is intentional on the part of state and federal legislative bodies: the safety of the child outweighs inconvenience to the alleged bad actor. Legislative bodies have balanced the possible inconvenience and injury to an accused adult (or older child) and found it to be insufficient to overcome the compelling interest of *protecting vulnerable children*.

GROOMING THE GATEKEEPERS

Circumstances giving rise to a report of sexual abuse are rarely convenient, easy or unemotional. Instead, allegations typically involve behavior that is *difficult to believe* about an individual who is *difficult to suspect*. Keep in mind: false allegations are rare – the majority of outcries are truthful and factual.

In some circumstances, ministry leaders fail to report due to a fundamental lack of understanding of the *preferential offender*. Preferential offenders, who *prefer* a child as a sexual partner, generally have an *age and gender of preference* (e.g. *pre-pubescent females* or *adolescent males*). These offenders *groom* children for sexual abuse, and, in addition, *groom the gatekeepers* surrounding the targeted child, working to have parents, supervisors and co-workers believe them to be helpful, trustworthy and responsible.

When a ministry supervisor has been *groomed* as a gatekeeper, he or she rarely remains objective, and this is intentional on the part of the offender. Almost without exception, offenders create opportunities for *trusted time alone* with the targeted child, and because he or she is now 'known' and trusted, an allegation or suspicion is more likely to be discounted by co-workers and supervisors.

HISTORICAL ALLEGATIONS

Historical allegations — those that relate to alleged abuse occurring years or decades ago — have become common. In most circumstances, ministries should treat historical allegations as if the alleged abuse occurred *today*. Keep these two realities in mind: the United States has the best criminal justice system in the world, yet the system is clearly imperfect.

Two out of three children don't tell about abuse
Until adulthood, if ever.

In our current cultural context, two out of three children *don't tell* about abuse they have experienced until adulthood, *if ever*. This is further compounded by the fact that most children don't tell because “no one will believe me” (which, too often, is true). The Church must become more skilled at preventing abuse, recognizing signs and symptoms of abuse, and recognizing predatory behaviors and characteristics. A ministry's willingness to recognize and report suspicions of abuse forms a key element in protecting the children it serves.

If the historical allegation relates to behavior which occurred on your watch, in the context of your ministry, or the alleged abuser is a current or former staff member or volunteer, *report* to law enforcement. *Do not* assume that the passage of time makes a report time-barred or irrelevant; from a public perception standpoint, this looks like cover-up. In general, when in doubt ... *report*.

HEARSAY

Some fail to make a report of child abuse because the information they learned about the suspected abuse was ‘hearsay’.

Hearsay Defined *and Misapplied*

The legal definition of hearsay: *an out-of-court statement, made in court, to prove the truth of the matter asserted*. In a courtroom setting, the Rules of Evidence prefer the original source of a statement or utterance rather than a version of the statement being recounted by another. In short, ‘hearsay’ is a legal principle associated with forms of evidence that are admissible in a legal proceeding.

Suspicions of Abuse Include Hearsay

The concept of ‘hearsay’ is often interpreted by lay people as follows: *I cannot report an abuse allegation because I heard about it from someone else – therefore, I cannot meet the evidentiary threshold for making a report*. Ministry leaders must not, however,

confuse standards related to courtroom Rules of Evidence with state mandatory reporting requirements.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS – EVIDENTIARY THRESHOLDS

Many state legislatures have created an ‘evidentiary threshold’ well below that required to prove a matter in a criminal or civil proceeding – in fact, it is often the lowest possible threshold in law. State law requires mandatory reporters to report any SUSPICION of child abuse or neglect. Suspicion is commonly understood to mean: a feeling or thought that something is possible, likely or true. Hearsay falls clearly within this broad definition. In fact, most suspicions of abuse originate from something learned from another.

In short, legislatures intentionally create extremely broad definitions in order to receive as much information as possible in order to protect vulnerable children. Whether relevant information is ‘hearsay’ (or not) may play a role in subsequent criminal or civil proceedings, but ‘hearsay’ should never provide a basis for failure to report child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

Child Sexual Abuse presents a compelling concern to Sovereign Grace Churches.

The purpose of legal mandatory reporting requirements is to identify children in crisis situations and address each circumstance. Depending on the facts, some reports are referred to law enforcement authorities to investigate and, where appropriate, initiate criminal prosecution.

Some ministry leaders' failure to report is fear-based: fear of what will happen after a report is made. Common questions include:

- *I made a report in the past and never heard back – did anything happen?*
- *If I make a report to authorities, will someone come and take the child away?*
- *If I make a report, will the parents know it was me who reported?*

Each question above highlights uncertainty about the reporting process, which creates hesitation to initiate communication with the authorities. This section addresses what occurs *after* a report is made to Child Protective Services (CPS) or law enforcement. Ministry leaders are more likely to report child abuse and neglect when they better understand what happens 'behind the curtain' once a report is made.

EXPLAINING THE PROCESS

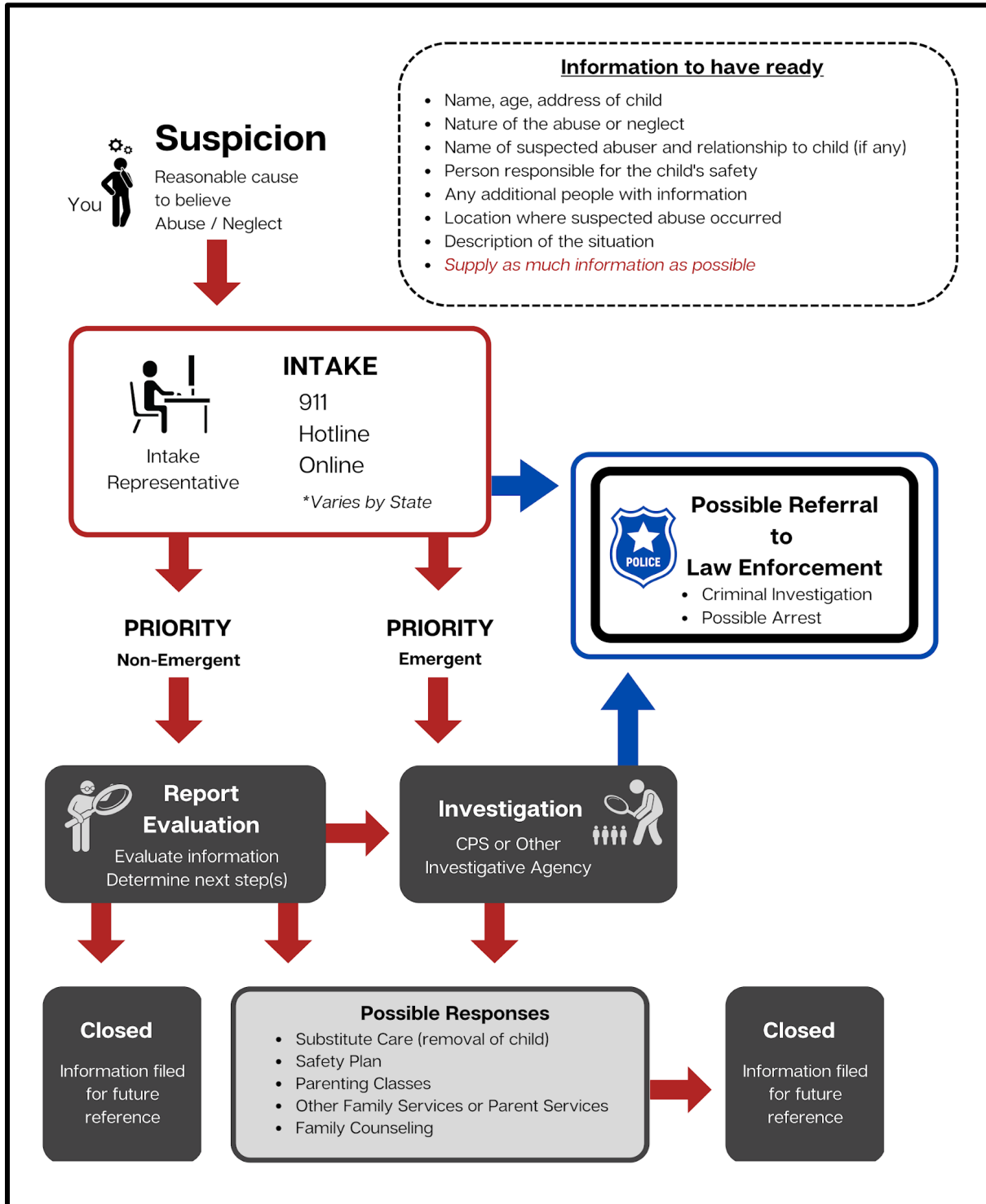
When a ministry leader reasonably suspects or receives an allegation of child abuse or neglect, a report to the authorities is the immediate next step. If churches are in multiple states, consider either removing this statement or listing this information for each state.

REASONABLE SUSPICION' OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Note that the threshold triggering a mandatory report is a *reasonable suspicion* (of child abuse or neglect), rather than actual knowledge or admitted behavior on the part of the abuser. Ministry leaders should not attempt to prove the existence of abuse or undertake an investigation as a *condition* of reporting.

INFORMATION FLOW

The following diagram illustrates the flow of information from the initial report to the close of the file, providing a simplified explanation of basic steps related to any report.



INTAKE SYSTEM

The report is received through an intake system with intake representatives trained to receive reports of child abuse and neglect, whether the report is made orally or online. The intake representative expects to receive as much of the following information as possible:

- Name, age and address of the child
- Nature of the abuse or neglect
- Name of person suspected of abusing or neglecting the child
- The relationship (if any) between the abuser and the child
- Person(s) responsible for the child's safety/protection
- Contact information for additional individuals with information
- Location where suspected abuse occurred
- Description of the situation
- Existing injuries, if any, and any medical or behavioral issues
- Any other information known or deemed important.

The intake representative commonly requests the information listed above, and will likely prompt the caller for data or request it be gathered. *The intake representative will not instruct you to investigate or provide PROOF of the suspected abuse or neglect.*

REPORT EVALUATION

What occurs after this report can vary. The report will be evaluated through a *scale of safety* to determine where and to whom the reported information is routed – and how quickly. Based on the reported information, the report will be prioritized or classified based on whether the child is in imminent danger (i.e., the abuse is violent or ongoing, the abuser is an authority figure in the child's home, or an immediate risk of abduction or retaliation exists).

Is the child in imminent danger?

The first and fundamental issue relates to the immediate safety of the child in question. The intake representative will quickly assess whether the facts justify immediate removal of the child (and other children), *or removal of the alleged abuser*. A child deemed in imminent danger is considered a High Priority or Priority 1, which may also result in an immediate referral to law enforcement.

Will the child be removed from the home?

The majority of reports of child abuse and neglect do not invoke Priority 1 status, which may give rise to the removal of the child. In fact, removal is rare. Nonetheless, the purpose of the system is *protection of the child*.

As depicted in the previous illustration, a Priority 1 matter will immediately trigger a CPS Investigation (see below),⁴ and possible referral to law enforcement for corresponding criminal investigation.

Fact patterns not considered Priority 1 are not considered insignificant. Rather, CPS has more time to evaluate the information without the risk of imminent harm to the child during the evaluation process.

CPS INVESTIGATION

Depending on the facts reported, an investigation may be opened. Each investigation will be framed by facts reported and subsequent information received or confirmed. What follows is not meant as a comprehensive or chronological description of the investigative process, but a general outline of the common elements of the investigation.

If a report is not deemed Priority 1 or otherwise urgent following the original intake, it may become urgent if merited by additional information gathered in the case evaluation process.

Interviewing the child

It is common for CPS to interview the child. Depending on the child's age and facts reported, this interview may occur in the child's home, at school or in the child advocacy center.

Protection of the child

If the CPS Investigator believes the child (or other children) is at risk, steps will be taken to ensure the protection of the child(ren), which may include a safety plan, removal of the child(ren), or removal of a potentially dangerous adult or aggressor child from the home. If the abuse occurred at school, for example, steps may be taken to have a potentially dangerous adult or child removed from the school, pending the conclusion of the investigation.

⁴ Child Protective Services (CPS) is a common description or departmental designation for the state or local agency or governmental department tasked with processing reports of child abuse and neglect, including intake, evaluation and investigation. The departmental name and delegation of responsibilities varies from state to state.

Possible responses

The CPS investigation is limited to the circumstances of the child's experience, including possible pathways forward meant to safeguard the child's safety and well-being. If the investigator concludes that the problem is the home environment or family dysfunction, CPS (or a related agency) may recommend or require a *safety plan*, which may include family services, anger management and other parenting courses, counseling or substitute care.

Referral to law enforcement

The purpose of any CPS investigation is to safeguard the health and well-being of the child, *not the prosecution of the alleged wrongdoer*. Any investigation of criminal behavior is performed by law enforcement (i.e., Crimes Against Children departments or detectives, criminal forensic investigators, sheriff's office or other criminal justice organization). Depending on the facts, CPS may refer a report to law enforcement for investigation and possible prosecution.

FUTURE VALUE OF THE REPORT

All reports are valuable, but not all reports are *actionable*. When an allegation of abuse is brought to a ministry leader's attention months, years or even decades after the fact, some ministries have failed to report simply because the allegation is old or involves individuals no longer involved or employed at the church. Be prepared to report historical allegations, unless it can be verified that someone in the ministry *previously* reported.

The passage of time may mean the criminal statute of limitation has run, such that the bad actor cannot be criminally prosecuted, but that evaluation is up to criminal law enforcement authorities. Reporting has value regardless: it affirms the victim, creates accountability, puts the alleged abuser's name in the criminal investigation system, and illustrates transparency on the part of the ministry. This is particularly important when the alleged abuser served as a ministry leader, employee, staff member or volunteer.

Guiding principle: when in doubt, **REPORT**.

WILL MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Often, CPS and law enforcement are required by state law to keep the reporter's identity confidential. Release of the reporter's identity is only allowed under very limited circumstances, for example, when information is needed for conducting a criminal investigation arising from the report or upon a finding that the reporter knowingly made a false report.

NOTIFYING THE PARENT OR CAREGIVER

Best Practice: AFTER the report has occurred, informing the child's parent or caregiver may occur ONLY if the child is not thereby endangered by doing so. For example, if a child says she was molested by her mother's boyfriend who lives in the home, do not inform the child's mother: doing so may endanger the child. When in doubt, err on the side of protecting the child.

SUMMARY – KNOWLEDGE DISPELS FEAR

In many cases, ministry leaders fail to report suspicions or allegations of child abuse due to fear: fear of what will happen *after* a report is made. Ministry leaders are more likely to report when they better understand mandatory reporting requirements and the reporting process: what occurs 'behind the curtain'. If *every* reasonable suspicion or allegation of Child Sexual Abuse is simply reported by church leaders to appropriate authorities, the Church *and* its children are better protected.

APPENDIX 1:

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE RESPONSE PLAN

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CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE RESPONSE PLAN

BIG PICTURE QUESTIONS

- Will this issue/event define the church, in terms of public perception?
- What is the cost of managing (or mismanaging) a Child Sexual Abuse allegation?
- How will this reflect on the church's reputation within the community?
- Will the church's enrollment or census suffer?
- What is the impact on the congregation's trust in the church's *child-safe culture*?
- What may a Child Sexual Abuse claim or lawsuit cost the church?
- Is the church carrying adequate insurance coverage to address this specific risk?
- How will the church maintain a victim-centered response?
- How will the church commit to caring for survivors of abuse?

DESIRED COMMUNITY PERCEPTION

How do we want to be characterized by our community?

- Caring and compassionate
- Open and transparent v. closed and self-protective
- Victim centric v. organizational-focused
- Integrity v. cover up

ADDRESSING A CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (CSA) ALLEGATION

- Creating (and following) a defined *written* plan is imperative.
- Who manages the plan (e.g. Executive Pastor or other)?
- The PLAN must include contact information for critical individuals and entities, including:
 - Mandatory Reporting contacts (see below)

- Attorney (with significant experience addressing CSA issues)
- Insurance agent and carrier
- PR or media contacts

REPORTING CONTACT LIST:

- Local law enforcement agency: **Call 911**; or
- Statewide Reporting Hotline: (Know your state's hotline number or reporting process)

INFORMATION TO PROVIDE WHEN MAKING A REPORT:

- Provide as much identifying information (ex. name, date of birth or age, sex) and locating information (ex. address, phone number, school) of the child, child's parents or other persons responsible for the child's care as possible
- Include as much detail about the incident(s) or concern(s) as possible
- If the answer to a question is unknown, simply explain that it is unknown
- Any other information that the person making the report believes may be helpful

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTING PLAN:

- Create *clear instructions* if a mandatory report to authorities is necessary:
 - To whom and within what timeframe to report (Report 'immediately' by telephone or in person, followed by a written report, if requested, within 48 hours).
 - Required information for report.
 - Request the name of the person to whom the report is given and the file number.
- Document the report in writing, including the date and time of the report (ONLY FACTUAL INFORMATION, *no speculation*). **Remember, when in doubt, REPORT.**
- Failure to report isn't just a bad idea, IT'S A CRIME, with criminal penalties!
- Reporting must occur *regardless* of the desires of the child or his/her parents.

- NEVER promise confidentiality to a child where child abuse is alleged or suspected.
- Create a partnership with local law enforcement for reporting purposes.
- Create known, easy access to critical documents:
 - Insurance policies
 - State Reporting Requirements
 - Contact information for critical individuals or entities
- Designate a media/information point-person. Who will speak on behalf of the church, and WHO SHOULD NOT?
- If child abuse is alleged to have occurred *within a church ministry program*, immediately put the church's insurance carrier *ON NOTICE, in writing*.
- Create a communication tree (phone/email/text) to inform key individuals, church staff members, and stakeholders.

VICTIMS/VICTIMS' FAMILIES

- All actions should occur from a VICTIM-CENTRIC perspective.
- Remember, FALSE ALLEGATIONS ARE RARE!
- Avoid any defensive posture that prioritizes REPUTATION over CARE.
- DO NOT IDENTIFY the victim(s) to the public or the congregation.
- Offer counseling with a licensed professional counselor of the victim's choice.
- Communicate with the victim(s) and their families:
 - Communicate early and often.
 - Listen with an empathetic ear.
 - Set aside organizational defensiveness or justifications.
 - Understand that parents will need to VENT.
 - Victims and families may be understandably angry!

- **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND CARE IS MORALLY RIGHT and ETHICALLY CORRECT.** In general, abuse survivors sue a ministry based upon how they are treated *after* the allegation is communicated to ministry leaders.
- The victim’s comfort should take priority over any desire to continue to support or provide ministry services to the (alleged) abuser.

Example: In a Peer-to-Peer Sexual Abuse scenario, the comfort and emotional protection of the non-aggressor (victimized) child should be prioritized. *The church may not be able to continue to provide ministry services to the aggressor child.*

- NEVER require the victim(s) to confront the alleged abuser.
- NEVER require *cheap forgiveness* of the alleged abuser from the victim.
- NEVER assume that *repentance* from the abuser is real or conclusive.
- NEVER give a known, admitted or credibly accused abuser access to children.
- How will the church manage gossip and backlash in the community?

In many cases, a group of children or families will support a well-liked staff member; keep in mind: *‘Molesters Groom the Gatekeepers’*.

- How will the church prevent bullying behaviors aimed at alleged victims? (For example: “She brought it on herself. She’s a”)
- Plan to manage subsequent bullying behaviors.
- Staff awareness is *key*.
- Social media may be used negatively (e.g. Facebook page to “save the staff member”).
- How will the church provide aftercare to affected children and parents?
Initially, if the alleged abuser serves as your staff member or volunteer, provide external counseling options with a licensed professional counselor, rather than ‘in house’. At the same time, Christ-based care and support are ALWAYS appropriate.

PARENTS/STAKEHOLDERS

Communicate with families immediately.

Effective and immediate communication with parents is critical.

- Discuss: How is this best addressed in various church programs?
- Avoid gridlock – What are the customary communication lines?

- Who receives priority in the communication process?
- Start with those more directly impacted and work OUT; direct others to the website or more general forms of communication.

Common Questions from Parents/Stakeholders:

- Has the church fired him/her yet?
- Why hasn't the church fired him/her yet?
- Did the church undertake a thorough background check when he/she was hired?
- What are the church's hiring practices?
- What will the church do to prevent this from happening again?
- Who will take over the alleged abuser's responsibilities?
- Is it safe to bring my child back?
- What are you doing at the church to protect children from abuse?

CHILDREN IN PROGRAM

- Identify and meet with children (through parents) who *may* have been impacted.
DO NOT INTERFERE WITH ANY ONGOING CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION.
- Include parents when communicating with children in the program; particularly important with children 13 and under.
- All should hear the same information, rather than garbled expressions or different 'facts'.
- Use caution when creating written materials to send home with children; assume written materials will be shared.

STAFF MEMBERS

- Briefings and debriefings:
 - Information provided to staff members should be uniform, but may be specific to hierarchy; upper leadership getting needed detail.
 - Allow discussion in a closed and safe setting.
- Employee assistance programs - counseling resources:

- Provide resources for self-care.
- Identify resources for counseling care.
- Longer-term follow-up:
 - Follow-up with individuals close to circumstance: co-workers, and/or friends.
- Expect to deal with staff members' anger, sense of betrayal and disappointment.

LEGAL COUNSEL

- Clearly identify skilled legal representation conversant with sexual abuse issues.
- How will the church address allegations of wrongdoing against the ministry?
- How will the church address potential wrongful termination issues?

INSURANCE CARRIER – COVERAGE FOR CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ISSUES:

- Identify insurance agent: is the agent knowledgeable concerning sexual abuse?
- Review coverage for critical incidents and occurrences of this nature.
- Does the church have adequate insurance coverage, given the current environment?
- Does existing insurance policy have an exclusion, endorsement, qualification or limitation of coverage for matters related to sexual abuse or sexual misconduct?
- If an allegation or suspicion of abuse relates to a church employee or volunteer, immediately put the carrier ON NOTICE, *in writing*.

MEDIA MANAGEMENT

How will the church proactively provide information to stakeholders and manage media?

- Who is responsible for media communications?
- How will the church address news reporters calling church leaders?
- How to address news reporters calling staff members OUTSIDE the church?
- How will the church monitor local press coverage and social media posts?
- How will the church manage media on campus (physically), or on adjacent property?

- How will the church utilize social media, if at all? (If social media is utilized to provide and direct communication regarding an allegation, do so very carefully.)
- ONE designated individual should speak on the church's behalf.
If other staff members or volunteers are contacted:

"We take child safety very seriously. In order to get you the most accurate information, let me give you _____'s phone number (designated staff)."

Common Questions from Media:

- Please comment on the incident....

"We want to let law enforcement do their jobs without interference or speculation. We take child safety VERY seriously at _____ Church. This is why we reported the allegation immediately when it was communicated to one of our staff members."

- Is this worker still employed? Is this volunteer still involved?

"The staff member/volunteer is taking a leave of absence during the pending investigation OR is working in a position where he/she is not interacting with children."

- Could there be more than one victim? Have other children been impacted?

"Our top priority is the protection of children. We are fully cooperating with law enforcement in its investigation. At this point, we are not aware of any other victims. OR At this point, we are taking steps to determine what steps should be taken to more effectively protect children in _____ Church programs."

- When did you first hear about the allegations?

"In accordance with our policy, the allegation was reported immediately, after it was communicated to one of our staff members."

- Can you give us details about the charges?

"We are fully cooperating with law enforcement, who are currently investigating. We don't want to interfere with the investigation in any way, so we can't discuss details at this point."

- Have you seen the evidence (text messages/photos, etc.)?

“We are fully cooperating with law enforcement, who are currently investigating. We don’t want to interfere with the investigation in any way, so we can’t discuss details at this point. OR We’ve been instructed by law enforcement to limit discussion of details so that the investigation can proceed effectively.” (A common occurrence)

- Was the alleged abuser screened (background check, etc.)?

“All _____ Church staff members or volunteers who work with children complete a background check and stringent screening process, including an application, interview and reference checks. This process was created by child protection experts.”

- Has he/she been charged with anything like this in the past?

“No. All _____ Church staff members and all child-serving volunteers complete a background check and stringent screening process, including an application, interview and reference checks. This process was created by child protection experts.”

- Has the church fired the alleged abuser? Why? Why not?

In order of preference:

“The staff member has been terminated from employment OR is taking a leave of absence during the pending investigation OR is working in a position where he/she is not interacting with children.”

“The volunteer has been suspended from all interaction with children during the pending investigation.”

ADMITTED BEHAVIOR

After an allegation or suspicion of abuse is reported:

If abusive behavior is admitted, in part or whole, immediately terminate the employee or volunteer and communicate that he or she is no longer welcome on church property.

‘An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure!’

- Implement an effective Safety System.
- Utilize effective training: educate staff members and volunteers to recognize *the abuser’s grooming process* and *common grooming behaviors*.
- Hiring processes: SCREEN your staff members and volunteers.

- Understand what an effective background check does, or does not, accomplish.
- Will staff members know to tell, *and whom to tell*?
- Foster a culture of communication: ***if you see something, say something.***

APPENDIX 2:

SEXUAL ABUSE FIRE DRILL

Sexual Abuse 'Fire Drill'

Put Preparation to the Test

Gregory S. Love, Esq.
Kimberlee D. Norris, Esq.

In classrooms across the country, school administrators lead faculty and students through mock disasters (fires, shootings, bomb threats, tornados, etc.) to ensure the existence of sound safety plans, communicate expectations to all involved, and determine any necessary changes or improvements.

A failure to drill potential disasters can lead to catastrophic results, generally with little or no warning. In the midst of a crisis it's too late to prepare; the catastrophic event simply reveals whether the ministry took reasonable steps to *prepare* for a foreseeable event.

A sexual abuse allegation can cause significant difficulty, and ministries serving children should 'drill' to better address these issues:

- *Is a sound sexual abuse Safety System in place?*
- *Do all staff members and volunteers understand their role?*
- *Are changes or improvements needed?*

Failure to prepare for this risk can lead to catastrophic results.

- Are your staff members and volunteers prepared?
- How would your Safety System 'respond'?

A Sexual Abuse *Fire Drill* is essential.

Assume an allegation related to a staff member, volunteer or participant is received by your ministry. *For purposes of this exercise*, assume the allegation involves multiple victims, and the accused is a trusted staff member or volunteer. With these 'facts' in mind, walk your ministry through all existing responsive steps, including:

- Insurance Coverage issues and required notices and responses;
- Statutory Reporting Requirement actions and responses; and
- Safety System elements and required responses.

INSURANCE MATTERS

As to existing insurance coverage, the drill is designed to answer these questions:

- Does the ministry have the correct coverages for a multi-victim claim?
- Does the ministry have sufficient coverage (limits) for a multi-victim claim?
- Are there endorsements, riders, limitations or qualifications related to coverage?

Most ministries purchase insurance coverage through an insurance agent. During the insurance purchase or renewal process, the primary coverage issue negotiated relates to Property & Casualty (P&C). The P&C portion of the premium will typically account for the majority of the total insurance premium. Without an explicit Sexual Misconduct endorsement, sexual abuse claims typically fall within General Liability policy

coverage—most general liability coverage will now include a separate sexual misconduct section. Few policyholders are familiar with the terms of the General Liability policy, the limits related to any sexual abuse claim, or terms requiring notice to the carrier when the ministry ‘receives facts that could give rise to a claim’.

Recently, the law firm (Love & Norris) was retained by a church facing sexual abuse allegations related to a trusted staff member, with four female victims, aged seven to nine. When asked, ministry leaders indicated that the ministry had insurance providing \$1 million/\$3 million in coverage. When asked whether their insurance carrier was notified when the initial ‘facts’ came to light, leaders replied ‘no.’

At this point, it was too late to ‘drill.’

Three significant shortcomings were revealed.

Insurance Coverage

First, the ministry could not recall the name of their insurance agent. As a result, the ministry could not quickly and easily understand what coverage was in place: Commercial General Liability Policy (CGL), Errors & Omissions Policy (E&O), Directors & Officers Policy (D&O) and/or Umbrella Policy. The delay was critical due to the fact that the crisis unfolded on a Saturday.

Second, the underlying policy did NOT provide \$1 million/\$3 million in coverage. Upon closer inspection, the policy included a specific ‘Sexual Misconduct’ provision which limited coverage to \$100K/\$300K for sexual abuse claims. There was no E&O, D&O or Umbrella Policy.

Third, leaders indicated they were informed about the allegations early on, but failed to notify criminal authorities *or their insurance carrier* because the reports were ‘hearsay’.

In the midst of crisis, the ministry learned its insurance coverage was grossly inadequate, and it was too late to supplement or improve coverage amounts. In this case, the carrier ultimately paid the \$300,000 aggregate, and satisfied its obligation under the CGL policy, and the ministry was forced to absorb defense costs and indemnity out-of-pocket.

Before crisis hit, the ministry should have secured sufficient coverage limits, and considered acquiring additional supplemental and umbrella policies. When queried concerning the efforts of the ministry’s insurance agent, the ministry’s leaders responded that the agent relationship was inherited from a predecessor; and leadership did not know the identity of the agent or have contact information.

Notice to Insurance Carrier

Additionally, leaders (and therefore all staff members) were unfamiliar with specific state reporting requirements related to an allegation of abuse or neglect (discussed below in Reporting Requirements), as well as the ‘notice’ requirement contained in all insurance policies.

The ‘notice’ provision generally reads like this:

In the event the insured receives information about facts that could give rise to a claim, the insured is required under this policy to notify the insurance carrier immediately, but not later than 24 hours.

The ministry received an allegation several months earlier but considered the information ‘hearsay’—an oral report from a parent about inappropriate touch described by their seven-year-old daughter. This communication *should* have triggered a communication by the ministry’s representative to their insurance carrier. Failure to notify an insurance carrier in this circumstance can result in a ‘reservation of rights’ or a denial of coverage by the carrier. Either scenario places the ministry in an adversarial position with its insurance carrier. In the above situation, the carrier weighed its options and simply tendered its limits because the aggregate (\$300,000.00) was insignificant compared to the cost of filing a Federal Court lawsuit seeking a Declaratory Judgment against the ministry— seeking a court finding that the ministry breached its duty to notify the carrier, relieving the carrier of its obligation to provide indemnity or defense.

The Sexual Abuse Fire Drill can be helpful in assessing insurance availability and sufficiency. By assuming a multi-victim allegation involving a trusted staff member or volunteer, the ministry may evaluate all insurance instruments for potential coverage (CGL, D&O, E&O, Umbrella, etc.), confirm limits provided, and clearly understand any limitations. The ministry should include its insurance agent in this evaluation.

The ministry’s leadership should clearly understand *when to notify the carrier*, and *what information to include*. A timely and proper notification to a carrier is far more likely to occur when staff members have been trained to understand the risk of sexual abuse and the common behaviors of sexual abusers. Some entities receive information, but do not appreciate until much later that the information received clearly provided ‘facts that could give rise to a claim.’

As a result, it is important that the ministry’s staff members and volunteers have a practical understanding of the sexual abuser’s ***grooming process*** and that leaders understand the specific requirements of each policy concerning notification to the carrier.

A Note on Insurance Agents

A ministry’s insurance agent fills an important role in the ministry’s risk management effort. The agent should have a strong understanding of the ministry’s industry, coverage needs, unique risks, and methods to reduce these risks. Too often, an agent can assist a ministry in the purchase of Property & Casualty coverage, but remains ill-equipped to address the risk of sexual abuse and related coverage needs for a particular ministry. Part of the Fire Drill should be an evaluation of the insurance agent to satisfy the ministry that the agent is familiar with the unique risks that face the ministry and necessary Safety System elements to reduce risk in light of legislation and licensure issues. As well, an agent should be able to assist the ministry with reporting requirements to the authorities and insurance carrier when necessary.

To equip insurance agents and risk managers in this area, attorneys at MinistrySafe and Abuse Prevention Systems have created a Risk Manager Tutorial—a three-part video series to provide an instructional overview regarding sexual abuse risks, assessment and pitfalls. (Click [here](#) to access additional information.)

STATE LAW REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Every state in the United States has legislated reporting requirements related to child abuse and neglect. These requirements vary state by state, but all states have defined 'mandatory reporters'; adults who are required by law to report suspected abuse or neglect. In some states, *all adults are mandatory reporters*. In others, specific professionals or individuals in child-serving positions are mandated to report abuse or neglect. Ministry leaders must research state reporting requirements in the areas the ministry provides services, and *train personnel to understand and apply relevant state reporting requirements*.

Because all states have legislation protecting 'good faith reports' of abuse or neglect, it is always best for ministries providing services to children to err on the side of protecting the children they serve *by reporting suspected abuse or neglect*, whether mandated to do so or not.

SEXUAL ABUSE SAFETY SYSTEM

Unfortunately, many ministries serving children cannot effectively evaluate this risk, because sexual abuse is a risk its leadership and management personnel do not understand. As a result, these ministries are operating without an adequate system to reduce the risk of sexual abuse.

It's impossible to prepare for a risk that you don't understand.

Before a 'Fire Drill' has value, an effective SAFETY SYSTEM must be in place.

To assess SYSTEM effectiveness, these questions should be answered:

- *What Safety System is in place, and what are its specific components?*
- *What constitutes a 'reasonable Safety System' for your program?*
- *Does the SYSTEM include Training for staff members and volunteers?*
- *Does it include an effective screening process?*
- *Do staff members and volunteers know 'what to do' when an allegation occurs?*

Five elements of an effective Safety System are described below. Click [here](#) for a Demo of the MinistrySafe Control Panel.

Elements of an Effective Safety System

An effective Safety System should contain the following elements:

1. Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

Awareness Training is the foundational element of an effective Safety System.

Awareness Training equips leaders, staff members and volunteers with a better understanding of sexual abuse risk by providing *accurate information*, including:

- Facts and common misconceptions concerning sexual abuse and abusers;
- Common abuser characteristics;
- The abuser's *grooming process* (selecting and preparing a victim for abuse);
- Common *grooming behaviors*;
- Peer-to-Peer sexual abuse;
- Short and long-term impact of abuse; and

- Legal reporting requirements.

With an understanding of the *abuser's grooming process* and *common grooming behaviors*, staff members and volunteers are better equipped to recognize inappropriate behavior within ministry programs. For example, *grooming behavior* in a youth sports environment may appear different from *grooming behavior* at camp or in a youth ministry program. Awareness Training equips staff members and volunteers with 'eyes to see' and 'ears to hear' abuser characteristics and grooming behaviors.

Effective Policies and Procedures should be shaped around an understanding of the abuser's grooming process and grooming behaviors. Through Awareness Training, staff members and volunteers can be trained to better understand the *purpose* of policies, therefore serving more effectively within policy boundaries, and recognizing problematic behaviors before an abuser has sexual contact with a child. Because program leaders, staff members and volunteers have been trained to understand grooming behaviors, all are better equipped to receive and report allegations, both internally and to appropriate authorities.

Online Training. MinistrySafe provides an online system that allows Members to manage Safety System elements utilizing the online MinistrySafe Control Panel. From the Control Panel, MinistrySafe Members may train (generate Training links, track completion, periodically refresh and re-train), access policy and screening forms, order Background Checks (order, review and archive with the Fair Credit Reporting Act compliance), and more. To learn more about online Training and resources, click [here](#).

Click [here](#) to learn more about MinistrySafe Membership.

Live Training. Live Training is available throughout the United States, presented by attorneys and sexual abuse experts Gregory Love and Kimberlee Norris. When offered *live*, Training may be tailored to a ministry's specific circumstances, services or needs.

Click [here](#) to learn more about Love and Norris or [here](#) for *live Training information*.

2. Skillful Screening

You cannot screen for a risk you don't understand.

Most ministries employ some sort of screening system, but do not understand high-risk behaviors or risk indicators common to abusers. Such screening systems have limited effectiveness in identifying the wolf (abuser) before it enters the sheep pen.

Skillful Screening is a critical component of an effective Safety System. An effective screening process gathers information about an applicant to determine whether the applicant is a *high-risk candidate*.

Skillful Screening utilizes forms and processes *meant to illicit high-risk responses* from applicants or references. Sample screening forms are available to MinistrySafe Members from the Resources Library at [MinistrySafe.com](#).

Click [here](#) to learn more about MinistrySafe Membership.

'Forms are just paper' without effective training.

Skillful Screening Training includes:

- Recognizing and identifying high-risk behaviors;
- Using screening forms and processes to elicit high-risk responses;
- Getting high value from *references*;
- Using the application and interview to evaluate applicant *risk*;
- Understanding the uses and weaknesses of Background Checks;
- Recognizing evasive answers and 'non-answers'; and
- Utilizing follow-up questions when receiving an evasive answer or 'non-answer'.

An effective screening system requires the use of tailored screening forms, designed to elicit high-risk responses, overseen by staff members *trained to recognize high-risk responses* and undertake the necessary follow-up.

Skillful Screening Training is available live and online, presented by attorney and sexual abuse expert Kimberlee Norris. When offered *live*, this Training may be tailored to a ministry's specific circumstances, services or needs.

Online Skillful Screening Training is presented in eleven segments, approximately 2 hours in length. For additional information, see [MinistrySafe](#).

Skillful Screening Training builds on the foundation of Sexual Abuse Awareness Training; all Trainees should have completed Awareness Training prior to viewing Skillful Screening Training, which *assumes* mastery of the concepts explored in Awareness Training.

3. *Appropriate Background Checks*

Most child-serving ministries undertake Background Checks; commonly, this is the primary 'screening' component utilized. Many ministries lack good information to understand the realities of the criminal justice system and *the limitations* of a Background Check. Consider this statistic:

Less than 10% of sexual abusers will ever encounter the criminal justice system.
(*More recent studies indicate less than 3% of abusers will ever be prosecuted.*)

Given this reality, assuming a Background Check system is working *perfectly* (which is unlikely), more than 90% of individuals who have sexually abused children have no past criminal record, and these individuals *know it*. Making a reasonable effort to access past criminal history has become a Standard of Care for ministries serving children, but a Background Check cannot serve as a stand-alone Safety System.

Recognizing Plea-Down or Stair-Step Offenses. A Background Check provides *one* element of an effective screening process. Occasionally, screening staff members will see a 'hit' on an applicant's Background Check and fail to recognize the 'high-risk' nature of the reported offense, because screeners have not been trained to recognize 'plea-down' or 'stair-step' offenses. In criminal prosecutions related to sexual crimes, it is common for a first-time offender to be offered the opportunity to 'plea to a lesser offense.' Though the abuser may have been arrested and charged with 'aggravated sexual assault of a child', his attorney may negotiate a plea arrangement allowing the abuser to plead guilty to a lesser (*sometimes non-sexual*) charge, such as simple assault. Though the behavior and arrest related to sexual abuse of a child, the conviction and subsequent record has no reference to sexual behavior or wrongdoing. Offenses that bear investigation include assault, indecency, voyeurism, exhibitionism,

contributing to the delinquency of a minor (alcohol, tobacco or pornography), or any other charge encompassing nudity or minors.

Skillful Screening Training provides critical instruction concerning the effective use of Background Checks, plea-downs, and stair-step offenses. To learn more about online Skillful Screening Training, click [here](#).

Refresh Background Checks. Many ministries undertake a Background Check when an individual *applies* for a position, but fail to refresh the Background Check subsequently. Best practice? Renew Background Checks for all staff members and volunteers every two to three years.

Integrated Background Check System. MinistrySafe Members may request and track Background Checks utilizing our Online Control Panel, providing a complete screening system in one easily managed location.

4. Tailored Policies & Procedures

Most child-serving ministries have ‘policies’, whether written or unwritten. When an allegation of sexual abuse is made, both defense counsel and plaintiff’s counsel will immediately request the ministry’s ‘policies.’ Sadly, many ministries learn in the midst of litigation that ***policies are what you do, not what you say you do.***

Policies Should be Tailored. A common error revealed in crisis relates to poor policies. In the creation of policies, many ministries don’t know ‘where to start,’ and policies are cobbled together from multiple sources. Because ‘you can’t reduce a risk you don’t understand,’ cobbled policies based on limited understanding rarely adequately address this risk. A church shouldn’t attempt to utilize policies prepared for the Boy Scouts; a little league team shouldn’t try to use policies prepared for the YMCA, and so on.

To design and implement *tailored Policies and Procedures*, leadership should first gain a better understanding of sexual abuse and sexual abusers, as well as specific risks manifest in their particular service or type of programming. Armed with this knowledge, leadership should locate a good ‘core policy’ directly related to the ministry’s program or type of service. Policies should dovetail with and be grounded upon a strong understanding of the grooming process, abuser characteristics and common grooming behaviors; this information is provided by Sexual Abuse Awareness Training, described above.

Sample policies are available to MinistrySafe Members for schools, school athletics, camps, youth sports, children’s ministry, youth ministry, daycare, and other child-serving endeavors. Sample Policy forms are color-coded with periodic instructions for tailoring the form for specific ministries’ use.

*Importance of Awareness Training. **Policies are just PAPER without Training.***

Excellent policies *on paper* do not insure effective implementation of policies!

Absent-effective training staff members and volunteers will rarely embrace change, even in the form of well-crafted policies. Sexual Abuse Awareness Training provides the necessary information (the ‘why’) allowing staff members and volunteers to understand and embrace effective policies (the ‘what’).

5. Monitoring and Oversight

Sexual abuse of children is a large and growing issue. After an effective Safety System is tailored and implemented, systems of Monitoring and Oversight ensure continued diligence, such that *'you DO what you SAY you do'*.

To this end, child-serving ministries should periodically review Safety System elements, evaluate new programs for child protection issues, address any need for policy changes or updates and ensure the inclusion of Safety System concerns in performance reviews and accountability. Periodic review helps ensure that child protection is not jeopardized by the departure of one or two key staff members or volunteers.

Control Panel. The online Control Panel provides an essential component of Monitoring and Oversight, allowing a ministry to monitor and track Training, screening and Background Checks; set up for multiple access points to ensure a smooth transition when a staff member leaves the ministry.

User Information					Awareness Training		Background Check		Screening			
Name	Tags	Role	EMP / VOL	Status	Renewal	Status	Renewal	Application	References	Interview	Policies	
Abraham, Emily	North Campus, Preschool	trainee	VOL	👤		🚫		✓	✓		✓	
Alex, Jane	South Campus	trainee	EMP	✓	📅 11/05/2025	✓	📅 11/09/2025	✓	✓	✓		
Anderson, Brittany	Preschool, South Campus	trainee	EMP	✓	📅 11/11/2023	✓	📅 01/09/2023	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Barton, Amy	Camp 2023	supervisor	EMP	👤		🟢		✓				
Craig, Robert	Nursery	trainee	VOL	✓	📅 10/21/2023	✓	📅 05/09/2023	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Dawson, Shalee	Camp 2023	trainee	VOL	✓	📅 03/06/2023	✓	📅 05/05/2023	✓	✓			
Freeman, Jill	Camp 2023, Nursery	trainee	VOL	✓	📅 07/12/2023	🚫		✓				
Hastings, Laura	Preschool	ssa	EMP	✓	📅 02/15/2024	✓	📅 03/14/2024	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Jarrett, Chris		trainee	VOL	✓	📅 06/06/2023	✓	📅 06/09/2023	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Jennings, Lisa	Camp 2022, Preschool	trainee	EMP	✓	📅 09/28/2023			✓		✓		

CONCLUSION

A Sexual Abuse Fire Drill ensures that a ministry has appropriate insurance coverage and a sound safety plan – *prior to a crisis*. The Drill creates an opportunity for the ministry to communicate expectations to all, revealing necessary changes or areas for improvement. *It's too late to prepare in the midst of a crisis*; the catastrophic event simply reveals whether a ministry took reasonable steps to address the *known risk* of child sexual abuse.

Love & Norris, Attorneys at Law

Love and Norris serve as Guest Editors for the [Stop Sexual Abuse Series](#) published by Church Executive Magazine, and frequently write for various publications related to child sexual abuse risk, response, prevention and legislation.

Both serve as Visiting Faculty at Dallas Theological Seminary, teaching the only existing seminary-level course addressing sexual abuse risk: *Preventing Sexual Abuse in Ministry Contexts*.

About MinistrySafe

MinistrySafe provides industry-leading tools and resources to help churches, ministries, camps, schools and child-serving programs prevent child sexual abuse. Through online resources, MinistrySafe members implement the 5-Part Safety System: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training, Skillful Screening Processes, Tailored Policies and Procedures, Appropriate Background Checks and effective Monitoring and Oversight.

Gregory Love and Kimberlee Norris are partners in the Fort Worth, Texas law firm of Love & Norris and founders of MinistrySafe, providing child sexual abuse expertise to ministries worldwide. After representing victims of child sexual abuse for more than two decades, Love and Norris saw recurring, predictable patterns in predatory behavior. MinistrySafe grew out of their desire to place proactive tools into the hands of ministry professionals.

For more information, visit us at www.MinistrySafe.com.

APPENDIX 3:

SAMPLE CHILDRENS MINISTRY POLICIES



MYCHURCH

Children's Ministries

Policies and Procedures

MYCHURCH CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES

[SAMPLE POLICY FORM]

1st Principle:

Any policy document intended to protect children from sexual abuse must be rooted in the *abuser's grooming process*. For Policies and Procedures to be effective, staff members and volunteers must receive Training to better understand the grooming process of the offender and Peer-to-Peer sexual abuse risk. MinistrySafe provides this information through Sexual Abuse Awareness Training (SAAT) and Peer-to-Peer Sexual Abuse Training.

2nd Principle:

The *abuser's grooming process* varies depending on the age and gender of the victim, and type of ministry programming. Grooming of a child unfolds differently in children's ministry than it does in student ministry, camp ministry, or a youth sport program. Policies and Procedures must be rooted in the *grooming process* unique to the program, and the age and gender of children served.

Note: Sample Policies

MinistrySafe provides a variety of sample policy forms – rooted in the *abuser's grooming process*, and tailored to various types of programs (student ministry, education, camp, youth sport, daycare and more).

Contact [**MinistrySafe**](#) to learn more about additional policy and screening forms.

This sample policy is related to MyChurch's Children's Ministries.

How to Use this Sample Policy Form

This sample form contains color-coded prompts and instructional comments within the body of the document. Because there is no 'one size fits all' policy form, the authors have attempted to provide guidance on as many matters as possible. It is expected that ministry leaders **will modify these policy documents** to fit the programs, positions, facilities and other factors that make each ministry unique.

Red type is instructional and should be removed from the final draft of your policy document.

Yellow highlights relate to positions or titles assigned to a person or persons with supervisory responsibility (i.e., Children's Pastor or Executive Pastor). Modify this document such that the correct position or title for YOUR ministry is associated with the responsibility described.

Remove the highlights in your final policy document.

Blue highlights relate to specific state reporting requirements. Insert relevant state reporting requirements. *Remove the highlights in your final policy document.*

Once all highlights and red types are removed, be sure to re-check the Table of Contents to ensure that the page number listed corresponds with the appropriate section.

Dear Staff Member or Volunteer,

Welcome to MyChurch!

At MyChurch, we take our responsibility to care for children very seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which children can grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

This handbook provides a general overview of procedures and guidelines for MyChurch staff members and volunteers. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for children. The following procedures have been adopted and will be strictly enforced.

After you have carefully read this policy manual, please sign and return the agreement form located on the last page.

Sincerely,

MyChurch Leadership

MyChurch

Children’s Ministries Policies & Procedures

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Overview of the MyChurch Safety System

Because we love children and desire to protect them, MyChurch requires all staff members and volunteers working with children or students (and other vulnerable populations) to complete **FOUR SAFETY STEPS** before ministry work or volunteer placements begin.

STEP ONE: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

MyChurch Policies and Procedures require that staff members and volunteers avoid abusive behavior of any kind. Staff members and volunteers are required to report any policy violations to a supervisor or a member of the MyChurch Safety Committee.

Staff members and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in 'grooming' a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, win the child's trust (and the trust of the child's parent or 'gatekeeper'), manipulate the child into sexual activity and keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

To equip MyChurch staff members and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, MyChurch requires all staff members and volunteers to complete MinistrySafe's Sexual Abuse Awareness Training. This Training will be renewed every two years.

STEP TWO: Screening Process

Staff members and volunteers are required to complete the MyChurch Screening Process, which includes:

- Employment Application (staff members only)
- Safety Application
- Face-to-Face Interview
- Reference Checks

**A volunteer must attend MyChurch for six months before being eligible to serve in positions providing access to children, students or vulnerable populations.*

STEP THREE: Policies & Procedures

Staff members and volunteers are required to review the policies contained in this manual and sign the last page, indicating that he or she has read and understood the material and agrees to comply with policy requirements.

STEP FOUR: Background Check

MyChurch requires that all staff members and volunteers working or volunteering in children or student activities or programming undergo a Background Check. Depending upon position, differing levels or intensity of Background Check may be required. Individuals who have committed sexually-oriented or sex-related crimes may not serve in any area providing services to children or students. In addition, certain other past criminal acts *may* preclude an applicant from serving minors.

The policy segment above is intended to clearly identify for an applicant with inappropriate motives the barriers to gaining access to children or students at MyChurch. In addition, the segment describes measures meant to equip staff members and volunteers to recognize abuser characteristics and behavior, as well as reporting requirements. These policy segments provide an **opt-out opportunity for would-be abusers.*

Child Safety Policy

ABUSE TOLERANCE

MyChurch supports and maintains a **zero-tolerance** policy concerning child abuse and neglect. It is a violation of [STATE] law for any staff member or volunteer to physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect any child participating in MyChurch programs. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer at MyChurch to act in the best interest of all children in every program.

In the event staff members or volunteers observe any inappropriate behaviors (i.e., policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual), it is their responsibility to immediately report their observations to their **immediate Supervisor**, the **Children's Pastor** or the **Executive Pastor**.

Designations may vary depending on the size, structure or reporting relationships within a church. This segment should identify the position or title of the individual to whom staff members or volunteers are to report.

*Note: In some states, mandatory reporting to law enforcement or child protective services is a **NON-DELEGABLE DUTY** for teachers, school staff members and school administrators. In other words, telling a supervisor or principal does **NOT** fulfill the mandatory reporting obligation.*

*In several states, employers **MAY NOT require** an employee to notify a supervisor or employer of the occurrence of a mandatory report.*

KNOW YOUR STATE'S LAW!

ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES

MyChurch staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff members or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all MyChurch policies. Anyone working with children or students at MyChurch is subject to the supervision and evaluation of the ministry staff members and must follow these guidelines. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment from a position in Children's Ministries – for both staff members and volunteers. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the **Executive Pastor** and the **Board of Elders**.

These positions or titles may vary depending on the structure or reporting relationships within a church body.

Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse

REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

MyChurch is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to local law enforcement (or Child Protective Services) and the MyChurch Safety Committee Chair.

An element of the safe environment referenced above includes the fostering of a culture of reporting relevant information to a supervisor or a member of the MyChurch Safety Committee. Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to 'groom' a child for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are asked to report *grooming behavior*, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to a supervisor or a member of the MyChurch Safety Committee.

REPORTING VIOLATION OF POLICY

In order to maintain a safe environment for our children, MyChurch staff members and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies. All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to an immediate Supervisor in the Ministry area, the **Children's Pastor**, or the **Executive Pastor**.

These positions or titles may vary depending on the structure or reporting relationships within the church body.

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child will be immediately suspended from participation in MyChurch Children's Ministries. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement, Child Protective agencies or MyChurch.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act should be precluded from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming that involves children, students or vulnerable populations at MyChurch. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment from MyChurch. Failure to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for termination (employee) or removal (volunteer). Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children, students or vulnerable populations at MyChurch.

Staff members and volunteers should discuss immediately with their supervisor any inappropriate action or breaking of this policy and will seek counsel from the church leadership and attorney, if needed.

REPORTING ALLEGATIONS OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE

We report all suspected or alleged abuse or neglect of children to local law enforcement or the [COUNTY or STATE] Child Protective Services Emergency Response Hotline:

1-800-____ - _____

Because many adults are unfamiliar with [STATE] reporting requirements and may be fearful of the process, MyChurch utilizes a ‘tandem or dual report’ model, where permitted. A ‘dual report’ occurs when a MyChurch supervisor reports the suspicion or allegation *together* with the individual who saw, heard or received information causing him or her to suspect abuse or neglect.

THIS PRACTICE IS NOT REQUIRED OR INTENDED TO INHIBIT ANY STAFF MEMBER OR VOLUNTEER FROM REPORTING TO LAW ENFORCEMENT, CPS OR THE ABUSE HOTLINE *DIRECTLY*. Instead, it is meant to facilitate reporting, protect children and support individuals who may not feel able or willing to report alone.

NO PERMISSION IS NEEDED from MyChurch before reporting to law enforcement personnel or the Child Abuse Hotline. In addition, a report may be made without involving or informing MyChurch personnel.

While not required by state law, please report all suspicions of child abuse or neglect (or any inappropriate or ‘grooming’ behaviors of a colleague or coworker) to an immediate supervisor

or a member of the MyChurch Safety Committee. This request is intended to assist the church in properly protecting children involved in MyChurch programs.

When in doubt, report.

State reporting requirements vary state by state. Research your state's law for specific reporting requirements for your church.

NOTE: A church should never investigate as a condition of reporting.

Safety Committee

SAFETY COMMITTEE

Recognizing the importance of providing and maintaining a safe environment for children, MyChurch will appoint and maintain a Safety Committee, which will meet once each quarter.

The purpose of the Safety Committee is to enable MyChurch Children's Ministries to carry out appropriate Ministry activities while safeguarding program participants against emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

COMPOSITION

The Safety Committee will be comprised of the following members:

- the Executive Pastor
- the Children's Pastor
- the Student Pastor

**These positions or titles may vary depending on the structure or reporting relationships within a church body.*

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Safety Committee will be charged with the following duties:

1. Applying existing MyChurch Policies and Procedures related to children's safety and risk management issues.

2. Monitoring all Children's Ministries programs for ongoing compliance with safety policies.
3. Making recommendations to the MyChurch **Board of Elders** regarding safety issues.

Children's Ministries Staff Monitoring Plan

BUILDING SAFETY

Every ministry supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the ministry program area is monitored during programming serving children. This includes unobserved monitoring of staff members, volunteers and children. No child will ever be left unattended in a ministry area or on a playground during regular programming, classes or activities.

SUPERVISION

Only parents (dropping off children), screened ministry volunteers, church staff members, and children are allowed in areas where ministry to children is occurring. All other adults should be asked for identification and immediately escorted out of the area. If questions or concerns arise related to any person in the area, a ministry supervisor or security team member should be notified immediately.

Two trained, screened adults should supervise children at all times.

MyChurch practices the *Two Adult Rule*, which requires a reasonable number of adult leaders (with a minimum of two) to be maintained when supervising children. A married couple or two family members comprise *one adult* for purposes of compliance with the *Two Adult Rule*.

Avoid being alone with an individual child in any room or during any ministry program. If one supervising adult must leave a group of children, another staff member or volunteer must be notified so that the *Two Adult Rule* can be followed.

If two individuals serving in a room are related, a third unrelated volunteer or staff member must also be present.

If an unusual circumstance occurs and you find yourself alone with a single child, take the child to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: if a child is the last in a class to be picked up by a parent, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present.)

If you need to talk with a child alone, do it in the hallway or a highly visible area, or have another leader with you.

Avoid distractions that would impact your ability to effectively supervise children and maintain situational awareness (i.e., use of cell phones, wearing headphones, etc).

After every ministry event, ensure that every room, area and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

PLAYGROUNDS

On the playground, remember to circulate, watching children during play periods, giving particular attention to areas not easily seen from all viewpoints. (Example: under slides, in corners, behind structures.)

Any two children together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area of the playground.

WORKER-TO-CHILD RATIOS

MyChurch is committed to providing appropriate supervision in all Children's Ministries programs. Accordingly, the following worker-to-child minimum ratios will be observed:

Program	Workers	Children
Nursery	2	8
Preschool, 2 & 3 years old	2	12
Preschool, 4 & 5 years old	2	18
Elementary	2	20
VBS	2	20

**The above ratios are MinistrySafe minimum recommendations. Where supervision is concerned, more is generally better.*

If a worker is *out of ratio* it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify the program supervisor or the **Children's Pastor**. Supervisors will make diligent efforts to find substitute workers to immediately bring worker-to-children ratios into compliance with MyChurch policy.

CHECK-IN

Upon check-in, each child will receive a name tag, and their parent or guardian will be given a claim tag. Volunteers must check each claim tag before releasing a child at pick-up.

[Customize to fit check-in process.]

If a claim tag is lost, send the parent or guardian to [REDACTED], where proper identification must be shown to a staff member before the child is released. (Have the child stay in the classroom; the parent may pick up the child once cleared.)

RELEASE OF CHILDREN

Any time a child has been entrusted to MyChurch staff members or volunteers, the church incurs responsibility for the safety and well-being of the child. Staff members and volunteers must act to ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge.

Children's Ministries staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing children in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities.

It is presumed a person who drops off a child or student has authority to pick up the child.

In the event staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact their immediate supervisor or the **Children's Pastor** *before* releasing the child.

Communicating with Families

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents are invited to observe all programs and activities in which their child is involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with their children's programs at MyChurch will be required to complete the MyChurch volunteer application and screening process.

Parents who leave a child in the care of MyChurch staff members and volunteers during church services or activities will be contacted if their child becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in ministry programs.

Disciplinary Policies

DISCIPLINE

It is MyChurch's policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children. **No form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. When a child is misbehaving, follow these steps:

1. Go to the child and calmly ask him or her to stop the behavior. (Most children respond immediately and correct the behavior.) Give a warning and remind the child of class expectations, and redirect to a positive behavior. Do this individually when possible, try not to single out a specific child in a large group setting. **When working with younger children, some physical redirection may be necessary: for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child who is hitting another.*
2. If the child repeats the action, guide him or her to a quiet place – separate from the other children – for a short but designated period of time. Stay within sight of others, and avoid being alone (or unseen) with the child.
3. Provide the child with a simple, understandable reason for the separation, and a clear explanation of your expectations. (“Georgia, you didn’t stop hitting Cole when I asked you to, so it was necessary for me to separate you from the group.”)
4. After a third time, refer to a staff member. A staff member may inform a parent or guardian, who may be asked to become involved in redirecting misbehavior.

Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported to the ministry supervisor.

NEVER...

- Yell at a child.
- Grab a child.
- Threaten a child. Always follow through with your word.
- Hit a child.
- Confront a parent in front of others.
- Openly humiliate a child in front of the class.

BULLYING

Verbal, physical or emotional bullying is not acceptable in MyChurch ministry programs. At the first sign of bullying in any form, act decisively, and inform your ministry supervisor. There is no *harmless put-down* where bullying is concerned.

1. *First Offense*: Issue a warning to the child and a general reminder to the group that this kind of interaction is wrong. Try not to embarrass or chastise.
2. *Second Offense*: Pull the offending child(ren) from the group (in a seen or supervised location) and discuss the inappropriate interaction or behavior. Set clear parameters and behavioral goals. Let the child know that the next step is communication with a pastor and the child's parents. Notify an immediate supervisor of ANY signs of bullying or verbal abuse.
 - a. Privately, but with another adult present, confirm that the child who was the target of the bullying behaviors is not in danger of continued harassment and is physically and emotionally stable. **DO NOT SINGLE A CHILD OUT IN FRONT OF THE GROUP...** be discreet.
3. *Third Offense*: Send the child to a pastor or ministry supervisor for a phone call (or communication onsite) with his or her parent(s) and possible removal from the activity or event.

Restroom Policies

DO NOT USE OR OCCUPY a restroom in use by children. Adults should use a restroom separate and apart from restrooms used by children during weekend services or when there are children present. [Unless not possible given physical plant/facility limitations.] No volunteer OF ANY AGE should enter or occupy a restroom while children are using it. When no child is present, adults (and young volunteers) are allowed in a restroom (one at a time) so long as there is another adult at the doorway keeping any child from entering. Only adult females may change diapers, and must do so on diaper changer stations within plain view of other volunteers.

NURSERY CHILDREN

Because nursery children may require assistance with their restroom activities, all staff members and volunteers will observe the following policies:

Diapering

- Only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will undertake the diapering of children of either sex.
- Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of other nursery workers.
- Children will never be left unattended on changing tables.
- Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in nursery will be recorded on the registration cards ("Seth Adams has a medicine in the bag for rash.")
- Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.
- **Children should be changed on changing stations only.**

Toilet Training

- No child will be forced to toilet train.
- Only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will participate in toilet training efforts with children of either sex.
- When children are taken into restrooms, the door will be left partially open.
- Young children will never be left unattended in restrooms.
- Parents should be consulted on each child's progress in the toilet training process before leaving the child with staff members or volunteers. Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in the nursery will be recorded on the registration card ("Georgia can use the toilet, but she needs to be reminded – ask her if she needs to go.").

- Children should be assisted in straightening their clothing before returning to the room with other children.
- 'Accidents' should be handled by reassuring the child and completing the changing of diapers or underwear and clothing. Extra clothing and diapers are available from MyChurch in the children's area if the parent has not furnished a clothing change.

GRADES 1-6

If you must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, seek out another worker to accompany you. If another worker is not available, go to the exterior restroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance. Do not enter the restroom.

If a child requires immediate assistance, leave the exterior restroom door open when entering the restroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing his or her toileting activities, while the child remains behind the door of the restroom stall. Any assistance with the straightening or fastening of garments should be done in the presence of another staff member or volunteer.

If restroom use is required:

- Only *adult* female workers will assist children in the restroom, unless a parent is assisting their own child.
- Only one child in the restroom at a time in a single toilet facility.
- When a worker is assisting a child, the door must not be locked, and must remain ajar. In general, children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities. Encourage children to do all they can for themselves.
- All students in grades 1-3 must be accompanied to the restroom by a female leader. 4th and 5th grade students may go to KIDS ONLY restrooms alone with a restroom pass from their room.
- Be aware if a child repeatedly asks to use the restroom and stays there for unusual periods of time. Report this behavior to a supervisor if it occurs.
- A single staff member or volunteer should never take a lone child to the restroom.

DISABILITIES

Parents will offer instruction to staff members or volunteers to change the diapers of individuals with disabilities. After the age of 4, parents or legal guardians will change the diapers of all individuals with disabilities. If individuals with disabilities require assistance using the restroom, a volunteer may assist them in the restroom.

Verbal Interactions with Children

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and children should be positive and uplifting. MyChurch staff members and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission to aid parents in the spiritual growth and development of children.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to children in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff members and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children.

One-to-One Interactions with Children

Staff members and volunteers should never conduct one-to-one, unobserved meetings or interaction with children while participating in MyChurch Children's Ministries programs. Another adult who has completed the MyChurch application and screening process should always be present.

Sexually Oriented Conversations

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with children, and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any child in the program.

Sexually Oriented Material

Staff members and volunteers in Children's Ministries at MyChurch are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children.

Physical Contact

MyChurch is committed to protecting children in its care. To this end, MyChurch has implemented a 'physical contact policy' which promotes a positive, nurturing environment for

our Children's Ministries while protecting children. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in Children's Ministries programs:

- Physical contact in any form should be above reproach, for the benefit of the child, and never based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.
- Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff members or volunteers in Children's Ministries must foster trust at all times.
- **Appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and children is important for children's development and is generally suitable in the church setting.**

AVOID the following interactions:

- Never touch a child in sensitive areas (breasts, buttocks, genitals) even if a child has been injured in one of these areas. Never allow casual contact in these areas, under or over clothing.
- No sitting on laps.
- No hand-holding, unless part of a worship/prayer service or a group game.
- Never touch in anger or disgust.
- Never touch in a manner that may be construed as sexually suggestive.
- Avoid touching a child between the navel and the knees.
- Never carry a child piggy-back, or on your shoulders.
- Never place hands beneath a child's clothing to play, rub or comfort.
- Never tickle, participate in 'horse-play' or wrestle with a child.

Do not force physical contact, touch or affection on a reluctant child. A child's preference not to be touched must be respected.

Physical affection should occur only in observable locations or when in the presence of other staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.

Staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others, including other children.

Inappropriate touch and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touch or display of affection should be immediately reported to an immediate supervisor, the **Children's Pastor** or the **Executive Pastor**.

Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse by a staff member or volunteer must be reported immediately to an immediate supervisor, the **Children's Pastor** or the **Executive Pastor**.

Electronic Communication & Social Media

All communication with children must be above reproach and indicative of healthy boundaries. As with any communication, the content of any electronic communication should be readily available to share with ministry leadership or a parent.

TEXTING

Texting between staff members or volunteers and children is not permissible.

COMMUNICATION APPLICATIONS

It is permissible for the ministry to use applications that have messaging features – using a Children's Ministry account. At least one other staff member must have credentials to access the application and regularly review the messaging, comments and postings.

It is not permissible for staff members to use ministry or personal accounts to direct message children.

PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA

Staff members and volunteers must maintain a high moral standard in social media presence. Inappropriate social media content may be a basis for suspension from participation in children's ministries at MyChurch. Please be cautious about the content of the posts on your personal social media. Please ensure that photos or videos posted on social media reflect MyChurch ministry guidelines related to alcohol, tobacco and modesty (dress, posture and content).

Tobacco Use

MyChurch requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of children or their parents, or

during MyChurch activities or programs, whether on campus or away. MyChurch is a tobacco-free facility.

Intoxicants

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any MyChurch facility, while traveling with children, or while working with or supervising children during any MyChurch program or activity.

Nudity

Staff members and volunteers in MyChurch Children's Ministries should never be nude in the presence of children. In the event there is a situation that may call for or contemplate the possibility of nudity (i.e., changing clothes during a pool party, weekend or overnight retreat, etc.), a staff member/volunteer will submit a plan to the **Children's Pastor** concerning arrangements for showering or changing clothes.

Physical Appearance

Please dress in modest, comfortable attire. Please do not wear thin-strapped shirts or low cut shirts while serving. First impressions are important; please take this into consideration while serving. Please:

- No revealing swimsuits
- No revealing/form-fitting clothes
- No shirts with low necklines or that show midriff
- No short dresses, skirts or shorts

Medication

Do not administer medication of any kind to any child while serving in ministry programs, including over the counter drugs. For certain trips or activities (i.e., mission trips, camps, etc.), MyChurch will bring a medical professional who will dispense appropriate medications consistent with other policies and signed parent permission forms.

Transportation

Staff members and volunteers may, from time to time, be in a position to provide transportation for children. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when workers are involved in the transportation of children:

- Children should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided.
- Staff members and volunteers should avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one child in transport.
- Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with children while in vehicles.
- Absent an emergency, **cell phones may not be used by drivers** while transporting minors (other than navigation applications for directions). In an emergency, stop the vehicle to use the cell phone, unless a stop cannot safely occur. Texting or other cell phone use is strictly prohibited while driving.
- No drivers under age 25 may drive MyChurch owned or rented vehicles.
- In transportation, the TWO ADULT RULE or *RULE OF THREE* must be followed.
- Transport only the number of children for whom you have seatbelts.
- Seatbelts should be worn at all times while in the vehicle.
- No one should be double-buckled.
- Use extra caution when driving children.

Planning Group Events

When planning a group event outside of regular programming, volunteer leaders should keep parents and staff members informed of details and abide by MyChurch policies. Some events may require a release form.

OVERNIGHT EVENTS

Some Children's Ministries activities/events require overnight sleeping arrangements for children, staff members and volunteers (i.e., camp, mission trips, etc.). All programmed overnights must be approved by a ministry supervisor and receive permission from parents. No overnights are allowed on MyChurch property unless part of a ministry-sponsored event.

No overnight between any church staff member or volunteer and an *unrelated* minor may occur in any context. If pre-existing family relationships exist wherein overnights may occur between 'family friends', these relationships must be communicated to a ministry supervisor.

For each overnight event, Children's Ministries staff members must create a child safety plan that will supplement this policy document to provide specific child protection steps unique to the event (activity, travel, location, other groups present).

Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement

I have received and read a copy of MyChurch's Children's Ministries Policies and Procedures and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving or working at MyChurch.

I understand the manual may be modified, and that any guideline may be amended, revised, or eliminated by MyChurch.

I have reviewed the duties listed in my ministry position description, and I agree to fulfill these duties. I understand I may choose to end my employment or voluntary service at MyChurch at any time (if possible, I will provide two weeks' notice to my supervisor).

I acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this manual in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between MyChurch and me. If applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no monetary compensation for hours worked.

I understand it is my responsibility to review new guidelines which may be created and distributed.

I acknowledge receipt of the MyChurch Policies and Procedures manual.

Staff member or volunteer name (please print)

Staff member or volunteer signature

Date

This page is to remain attached to the MyChurch Children's Ministries Policies and Procedures.

Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement

I have received and read a copy of MyChurch's Children's Ministries Policies and Procedures and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving or working at MyChurch.

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I acknowledge receipt of the MyChurch Policies and Procedures manual.

Staff member or volunteer name (please print)

Staff member or volunteer signature

Date

This page is to be signed, detached, and delivered to the Ministry Supervisor.