



## IS YOUR CHURCH A SAFE PLACE FOR KIDS? CHILDREN'S MINISTRY NEWSLETTER

### MINISTRY DIRECTION

Abuse is a reality. It happens everyday in every community throughout the world. But abuse shouldn't happen in the church. The offenders should not be ministry volunteers, church members, or pastors that the children are taught to trust and obey. Yet, Bill Anderson, author of ***When Child Abuse Comes to Church*** states, "Christians should be aware that church is a good place for a perpetrator to target."

Why? The book, ***Safe Sanctuaries*** by Joy Thornburg Melton, gives the following reasons:

- A church body trusts its members and leaders to conduct themselves appropriately.
- Many churches do not screen volunteers, employees, and pastoral staff who will be working with children and youth.
- Churches encourage close contact and personal relationships with children.
- Children's ministries are often understaffed and eager to recruit new volunteers.

If Jesus were here on earth, how do you think He would respond to the risk of children being abused in the church?

*"And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone abuses one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea" Matthew 18:5, 6*

It is imperative that every local church takes the necessary steps to insure that church is a safe place for children and those who minister to them. In this issue of the Children's Ministry Newsletter we want to provide you with ideas for developing basic procedures and guidelines that will help you do just that.

### IDEAS YOU CAN USE!

Many churches have been sued in recent years due to alleged child abuse or molestation occurring in church-sponsored children's programs. These suits have been based upon negligence of the church either in the hiring or recruiting of the accused worker or negligence in the supervision of the children.

## SCREEN ALL CHILDREN'S WORKERS

Yes, everyone who works with children should complete the screening process—even the pastor if he works directly with the children.

*First: Provide the applicant all necessary forms*

Application

Reference check form

Consent to criminal background check and any other forms legally necessary.

*Second: Screen the applicant*

- Review the application
- If the applicant is unknown to you, confirm his or her identity by requiring photographic identification such as a driver's license or passport.
- Contact each reference listed on the application and make a written record of each contact. Note the date and method of contact, the person contacted, and a summary of the reference's remarks.
- Be aware of legal requirements that apply to your particular state or nation such as a criminal background check, driving records, fingerprinting, etc. Obtain this information from a local attorney and your church's insurance company. After learning what procedures must be followed to protect the child and the church, follow them.
- Interview the applicant
  - Children's Ministry Magazine advises asking questions that might indicate inappropriate attitudes or responses. For example, "How do you handle children who won't mind?" and "What's the most frustrating child-related situation you've ever had to deal with?" (Children's Ministry Magazine, May/June 1995).
- Remember that all applications, records of contacts, and legal forms must be kept CONFIDENTIAL. Access to these files should be limited to those agreed upon by the pastor, board, and children's pastor.
- Determine whether or not the applicant will serve in children's ministry based upon the results of the application process.
- Do not allow anyone to serve if they have not been in attendance at the local church for six months or more and have not completed the screening/application process.

## IMPLEMENT SAFETY PROCEDURES

### Supervision

- Children should never be unsupervised.
- Follow the "Two-Adult Rule". The "two-adult rule" requires no fewer than two adults present at all times during any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children.
- Appropriate adult-child ratio.
  - Infants: 1 adult to 5 children

- Toddlers: 1 adult to 6 children
- Preschool: 1 adult to 10 children
- Elementary: 1 adult to 12 children
- Have adult volunteers who have completed the application process to monitor hallways during all children's ministry activities.

#### Restroom

- Two adults are assigned to the task of changing diapers or should be involved in the personal care of children.
- Only women should be involved in providing bathroom assistance for females.

#### Check in and Check out

- Determine a check in/check out procedure that includes who will check the child in, what procedure he/she will follow, and who will check the child out.

### TRAIN CHILDREN'S MINISTERS

Provide training on policies, age-level characteristics, discipline, child abuse awareness and emergency procedures

### EMERGENCY PLANS OF ACTION

Consider developing plans of action for—

- Natural and other disasters
  - Determining the evacuation route
  - Take roll call before evacuation and after evacuation
  - Wait with children until receiving instructions from designated person.
  - Do not release children to parents until evacuation process is completed.
- Medical Procedures
  - Have a first aid kit readily available and fully stocked.
  - Complete an accident report if a child has an accident while participating in children's ministry. Make two copies—one to give to the parents and one to keep on file.

Be sure and talk with the parent about the accident when he/she comes to pick up the child. If necessary, follow up with the child during the following week. Do NOT dispense medication. If the child needs medicine, contact the parent.

- Serious Injuries
  - Do not move the child and do not leave them alone.
  - Send another children's minister to find someone to assist.
  - Have someone call 911 then contact the parents.
  - Accompany the child to the hospital if the parents have not yet been located.
  - Immediately following the emergency write out a report of what happened.