

## Safety and Security in Your Children's and Youth Ministry

**Dollie Noa**, Children and Family Missions Mobilization, Baptists on Mission [dnoa@ncbaptist.org](mailto:dnoa@ncbaptist.org)

**Cheryl Markland**, Childhood Evangelism and Discipleship, BSCNC, [cmarkland@ncbaptist.org](mailto:cmarkland@ncbaptist.org)

It *Can* ('t) Happen at My Church!

- 33% of all girls and 20% of all boys will be abused by the age of 18
- 93% know their abuser: 34% are family members, 59% are acquaintances, 7% are strangers
- Over 90% of abusers are men, 73% of those are married or in a heterosexual relationship
- 93% of abusers consider themselves "religious"
- Less than 40% of abuse is reported to police, less than 10% of that number results in a conviction
- More than 40% of abusers were juveniles under the age of 18. 14% of that number of juvenile abusers were under age 12
- Children are most vulnerable between the ages of 8-12
- Child protective services finds enough evidence to prove a new claim of child sexual abuse in the U.S. every 9 minutes

Awana, Darkness to Light and RAINN

Abel Harlow Child Molestation Prevention Study:

*"This study found that pedophilia molesters average 12 child victims and 71 acts of molestation. An earlier study by Dr. Abel found that out of 561 sexual offenders there were over 291,000 incidents totaling over 195,000 total victims. These are enough victims to fill 2 ½ Superdomes! This same study found that only 3% of these sexual offenders have a chance of getting caught."*

--Startling Statistics: child sexual abuse and what the church can begin doing about it, Boz Tchividjian, Jan 9, 2014

### **Reasons for concern:**

- Protection of our children
- Protection of our leaders
- Protection of the church from adverse media coverage and civil litigation
- First impressions and parental expectations
- Outreach
- Use of volunteer based ministry
- Opportunities for "grooming" behaviors
- Perception of church as easy target

## Beyond Background Checks and Written Policies

### "Sexual abuse"?

*"Any tricked, forced, manipulated or coerced sexual activity for the pleasure of the abuser."*

**--MinistrySafe**

### Grooming for Sexual Abuse

Grooming is *"intentional acts that are designed to gain the trust of the victim and their gatekeepers in order to sexually abuse the victim at a later time."*

- We cannot reduce a risk we do not understand or recognize
- What we believe shapes what we do
- Abuser go where barriers are lowest
- There is no **visual** profile of an abuser

**--MinistrySafe**

### Groomer's targets:

- Child or teen
- Parents or guardians of that child or teen
- Organizational members and leadership

**Goal:** to be accepted by targets as **helpful, kind and trustworthy** in order to gain access to child or teen for extended trusted times

This disturbing truth is perhaps best illustrated by the words of a convicted child molester who told Dr. Salter:

*"I considered church people easy to fool...they have a trust that comes from being Christians. They tend to be better folks all around and seem to want to believe in the good that exists in people."*

--Startling Statistics: child sexual abuse and what the church can begin doing about it, Boz Tchividjian, Jan 9, 2014)

### Behavioral Profile of a Child Abuse Predator

- Charismatic, animated around children
- Appearance of being **helpful, trustworthy, kind**
- Primary relationships are with children/youth

### Grooming Process:

- Groom parents and organization in order to be thought of as **helpful, trustworthy, kind**; "one of the family." **Goal:** trusted time alone with child.
- Selection and targeting of victim
- Gaining trust and testing boundaries of victim (grooming)
- Introduction of accidental nudity and sexualization of relationship, use of inappropriate touch
- Testing enforcement of organization's policies and procedures
- Insuring silence of victim through shame, threats, blame, withdrawal of meeting needs, "no one will believe you"

**Groomer's Target:**

- Child/teen who is unconnected, on the fringe, or in need
- Child/teen who is looking for someone to follow or trust
- Child/teen from a broken family, single-parent home, absentee father
- Child/teen who is neglected emotionally or physically
- Child/teen already involved in alcohol, drugs or pornography (secret life)

**Tools groomer uses for building trust of child/teen:**

- Offer of gifts: brand name clothes, shoes, video games, event tickets, etc.
- Meeting of needs: emotional, financial, transportation, etc.
- Inappropriate affirmations of maturity or appearance: "you are more developed than your friends", "so beautiful, kind thoughtful", "more mature in thought", etc.
- Personal time and conversation
- Social media personas and promise of relationships to attract teen girls
- "Kid magnet" activities and environments
- "Forbidden fruit," alcohol, drugs, porn or inappropriate media or other off limits activities
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**Introducing Nudity and Sexual Touch:**

- Barrier testing and erosion (tickling, wrestling, prolonged hugs, "wedgies", etc.)
- Sexual discussion and joking
- Playful touch and 'accidental nudity' (walking in during clothing change or shower, "pantsing", strip poker, streaking/mooning)
- Creation of a culture where nudity is acceptable/cool
- Internet porn, magazines and movies depicting nudity/sexual activity

**Silencing victim:**

- Secrecy
- Shame and embarrassment
- Personal threats (direct or subtle)
  - "no one will believe you"
  - "this would hurt your mother"
  - "this would wreck our team"
- Threat to harm family, friends or pets

**Peer to peer abuse:**

- 300% rise in reported cases of peer to peer abuse in past six years
- Average age for first exposure to porn is age 8
- Average age for molesters to begin molesting is age 13
- Peer to peer abuse involves an imbalance of power: age, size, social status, intellectual ability, gender
- Over 30% of all reported sexual abuse is peer to peer abuse.

## ***Why is Policy and its Enforcement So Important?***

### **Non-negotiables standards for policies:**

- 2 adult rule
- 6-month rule
- Completion of vetting process
- Clear sightlines
- Check-in and release system

### **Other considerations for policy inclusion:**

- Bathroom and diapering procedures
- Appropriate touch and discipline
- Rooming at off-site ministries
- Non-compliance with policy

### **Small group gatherings (offsite):**

- Is space safe for children and youth?
- Are parents comfortable with childcare provider?
- Is this a church-authorized event? Whose insurance will cover financial cost if injury occurs?
- Does the church need to be notified of meeting?
- Is there an expectation that church child/youth protection policy will be enforced?

## ***Effective Vetting, Enforcement and Prevention***

### **Steps for Vetting Volunteers**

- Create and use a church approved application
- Conduct reference checks and personal interview
- Include background check of criminal records & sex offenders' registry
- Driver's license check for those transporting children and youth
- Ensure security of information

### **Church approved application**

- Addresses for last seven years
- Previous experience in children's/youth ministry or other volunteer work
- Brief testimony of personal salvation
- Reason for desiring to work with children/youth
- Past experience of being sexually or physically abused
- Permission to conduct background check
- Permission to conduct social media check
- Permission to check driver's license check if providing transportation or driving church vehicles to church-sponsored events
- Names and contact information for reference checks

### **Background checks**

- Defense of church during possible litigation: negligent hiring vs. due diligence
- Consider as one step in overall safety and security of children's and youth ministry
- Cost is \$12 to \$20
- Plan to repeat at least once every three years

### **Possible questions for reference check**

- How do you know this person and for how long have you known this person? Do you feel you know this person well enough to offer a reference?
- How does this person relate to other adults, children or teens?
- Would you trust this person with caring for your own child/youth?
- Is there anything else you feel we should know about this person?

### **Ideas for conducting interview:**

- Pray for discernment and guidance
- Read application before interviewee arrives
- Set tone of interview as conversational and relaxed
- Ask about any questions that may have arisen from reading application, any blanks or inconsistencies
- Review job expectations and policy guidelines
- Ask why the person wants to serve and past history of service. Can ask person to share their "story"
- Be ready to say "no" or offer other areas for service in the church in person is not a good fit to ministry
- Close in prayer

## **Policies and Procedures**

### **Create and enforce written policy:**

- Enlist development team
- Create written document, <https://ncbaptist.org/resource-creating-safety-security-policies-in-your-church/>
- Consider legal review (optional)
- Get formal approval by church governing body
- Inform and train parents and leaders impacted by policy
- Monitor compliance and have plan for non-compliance
- Evaluate and amend, as needed
- Provide on-going training for new and current volunteers
- Budget for background checks and for repeat checks
- Post visual reminders of policy points
- Have security supervision when children or youth are present/meeting
- Ensure clear sightlines into every teaching/meeting space
- Secure entrances to children's areas
- Do random visual inspections during teaching sessions

**Recognize inappropriate behaviors:**

- Awareness of warning signs: aggressive behaviors, targeted child/youth, inappropriate touch, boundary testing
- Increase supervision in high risk areas: bathrooms, closets, dark corners, warehouses, empty bedrooms/classrooms, structures that provide limited visibility, etc.
- Watch for and confront bullying behaviors
- Watch for possible abuse paired with imbalance of power
- Communicate concerns with other staff

**Establish clear boundaries for all for camp/off-site ministry:**

- No flags or blankets covering bedding or hanging from bedding
- No shower or bathroom checks
- Medical checks need to be conducted by approved medical personnel
- No special privileges
- Do not ignore anyone who feels uncomfortable or unsafe
- No physical touching between unrelated adults (model acceptable behaviors)
- No post-activity contact between adults and youth/children.

**Effective Enforcement**

- Clear sightlines into every classroom
- Consistently used check-in and release system for children
- Train leaders that no one should ever be alone with a child
- Budget for screenings and re-screenings
- On-going plan for training volunteers
- System for dealing with non-compliance
- Maintain safe volunteer ratios
- Plan for enforcement in both large and small group settings

**Handling allegations of abuse**

- North Carolina is a must-report state
- Report within the first 24 hours of receiving report
- Create and use response team, stress confidentiality
- Offer caring response, take allegations seriously
- Remove accused from service until allegations resolved
- Document allegations and response of church
- Contact insurance company
- Support with offer of professional counseling

## ***Safety and Security Resources for Children's Ministries***

BSCNC resources at <https://ncbaptist.org/children-resources-all/>

**Framework for Creating Safety and Security Policies.** This resource is designed to assist policy development teams by offering a framework for developing a church safety and security policy and procedure document through a series of discussion questions and suggested best practices.  
[https://ncbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/19.071\\_Creating\\_Safety\\_Security\\_Policies.pdf](https://ncbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/19.071_Creating_Safety_Security_Policies.pdf)

**Foundations of Children's Ministry Training Videos: Developing Safety and Security Policies.** This 9-minute video offers an overview of steps churches can take to increase safety and security in their children's ministry environment by creating and enforcing policies designed to protect the children of the church.  
<https://vimeo.com/album/4746268>

**Crib standards.** When possible, churches should consider purchasing cribs that meet the new government standards for safe cribs that can be used in the event of an evacuation.  
[https://ncbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/Crib\\_Safety\\_Standards.pdf](https://ncbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/Crib_Safety_Standards.pdf)

**Sample parent consent form for taking and using children's photos.** A best practice before taking and posting pictures of children to a church's social media or website is to have parents sign a permission form allowing this to take place. Careful consideration should be to never post a picture of a child in foster care. Never post pictures of children in "real time" so that a predator or stalker knows the location of a child in "real time."  
[https://ncbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/Parental\\_Guardian\\_Consent\\_Form.pdf](https://ncbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/Parental_Guardian_Consent_Form.pdf)

**First Impressions Church Walk Through.** This interactive resource is designed to help church consider the experiences that a guest may have when visiting their church for the first time. A major portion of this resource focuses on the perceptions parents may have about hygiene, cleanliness and safety and security when preparing to leave their preschool and elementary aged children in the classroom areas of the church.  
<https://ncbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/church-walk-thru-resource-editable.pdf>

**Safety and Security Resource List.** This list is designed to assist churches with learning more about topics related to the safety and security ministry of the church. Resource topics with links include insurance companies that offer extensive information related to safety and security, companies that offer screening and check-in tools, sample forms and sources for general information about protecting children and youth.  
<https://ncbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/safety-and-security-resources-2019.pdf>

**A Guide to Help Survivors of Sexual Abuse.** This resource seeks to equip your ministry to help survivors of sexual abuse. Topics include how to determine the classification of the information that is shared with you; how to report the information; how to listen and provide counsel; how to train the leaders within your women's ministry; and how to refer to a counselor.  
<https://ncbaptist.org/resource-womens-sexual-abuse-resource/>

## **Resources from Southern Baptist Convention**

**Introductory Guide to Caring Well.** This free guide will provide assistance to church leaders who are working to implement effective policies and procedures in their congregations. This practical guide aims to present a foundation of topics to consider, sample language and policies provided by leading sexual abuse prevention advocates, and links to further resources to help dive deeper into each area of prevention and care. <https://caringwell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Introductory-Guide-to-Caring-Well.pdf>

**Caring Well.** Resources to help churches create an environment that both protects the innocent and ministers to those impacted by abuse. Site offers free curriculum and resources to inform and train church leaders who care about preventing and healing sexual abuse. <https://caringwell.com/>