

Safe Kids

at Church and School

*A Short Guide to Writing and
Implementing Policy and Procedures*

by Steve Collins



DISCLAIMER: This booklet does not constitute legal advice. It contains the best practices known to the author at the time of publication (but the author is not an attorney). Your church or school should consult the most recently updated versions of statutes and regulations when handling instances of child abuse or alleged child abuse. We recommend that, before you implement these procedures, you consult an attorney for review.

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Introduction

We have a biblical mandate to be stewards of children

If you work in a Christian school or church environment, you understand the biblical mandate to be stewards of children. Parents have placed the wellbeing of their children in your hands and you have agreed to help those parents bring their children to faith and a life of Christian service.

Christ has given us specific commands as it relates to children. Luke 9:48 states that when we welcome a child, we also welcome Christ, and whoever welcomes Christ, welcomes he who sent Christ. Matthew 18:6–10 commands us to protect children. Mark 10:13–16 warns us not to hinder a child from coming to Him.

Note Mark 10:16: “And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.” Hands are intended to bless children. Contrast this to what the hands of an abuser does to a child and we see just how irreconcilable abuse is with the intentions God has for children. We also see how defiant a person is who uses his or her hands to sexually abuse a child.

Nothing violates these biblical mandates as much as child sexual abuse. The impact on a child’s spiritual development is so profound that many of the children who are abused never come to faith. Their concept of God as a loving father or someone they can trust is often damaged beyond repair. Of course we understand that no one is beyond the reach of God’s grace and transforming power. But we also must understand that when we assume the responsibility to train children, we commit ourselves to doing all we can to protect them.

Adults Protecting Children has worked with public and private schools as well as individual church congregations. One observation we have is that the public school systems have, for the most part, been more intentional than churches and schools in the area of written policy and training staff and volunteers. Because of our biblical mandate, Christian schools and churches ought to set the best example of being intentional in protecting children.

Where do you begin?

Always do the most important work first

Start with what provides immediate protection for children

Your policy and procedures documents will consist of 4 primary documents. We are listing these documents in the order of importance. The first thing you want to do is make sure the children you serve are safe and determine what to do if there is a disclosure, discovery or suspicion of abuse. Once you have these in place, you can take more time to work on the procedures you want to put in place.

Code of Conduct

The safety and nurturing of children are essential elements for any church or school. This includes valuing each child, regarding them as created in the image of God and therefore treating them with respect at all times. Adults must assume the full responsibility for setting and maintaining clear, appropriate boundaries in all interaction with children.

The most effective way to prevent abuse of children is to be vigilant in following standards of interactions between children and adults. All staff and volunteers who have roles with children are expected to interact with children in a mature, safe, capable way and with high accountability to the organization's leadership and to the Lord. A Code of Conduct document is a clear statement of what is expected in the interaction between adults and children in your church or school. In doing research for this book, we did an Internet search on Code of Conduct for Christian schoolteachers. The first 10 pages of search engine results did not have one single school with a Code of Conduct exclusively for teachers. All entries all had a Code of Conduct for students, however.

Make this your first document to complete.

Reporting Protocol

In you must have a protocol that lays out a step-by-step process that each person in the organization follows when there is a disclosure or suspicion of abuse. In many states there is a time frame within which a report must be made. In some states

the time is as short as 24 hours from the time of the first disclosure or suspicion to when Child Protective Services (states use different names such as DFCS) must be informed.

A reporting protocol is important to because it shows a commitment by the organization to follow the law. Failure of a mandated reporter to report is, in most states, a misdemeanor offense, punishable by imprisonment and fines. As much as some would like to protest this, mandated reporting is the law for many.

A reporting protocol is important also because it forces the church or school to avoid the decision to handle disclosures or suspicion “privately” or “in secret.” This is perhaps the most fatal mistake an organization can make. When you attempt to handle such a situation internally, you are communicating that the reputations of the church and the abuser are more important than the trauma experienced by the child.

Policy Document

This document explains what administrative actions and outcomes your school will take to protect children and to respond to an accusation of child abuse. Everyone in your organization should be required to read and understand your Policy Document. When you hire a new employee or allow a new volunteer to get involved, be sure they read and understand your policy document.

EMPLOYMENT ISSUES:

- >> Will you hire or allow to volunteer anyone for whom it has been determined committed child sexual abuse after his or her 18th birthday?*
- >> Will you hire or allow to volunteer anyone for who it has been determined committed child sexual abuse prior to his or her 18th birthday?*
- >> What administrative actions will you take if you learn of either past or current abuse by one of your staff or volunteers after you have hired them or given permission to volunteer?*
- >> What action will be taken if someone fails to follow your policy and procedures?*
- >> Will anyone be allowed to grant permission to deviate from or amend your policy?*

Procedures Document

Once you have the 3 documents above complete, then it's time to work on the specific details and steps to follow to make your environment and programs as safe as possible. Procedures are different from Policy. Procedures are more like guidelines that detail what should be done in the various aspects of your ministry. Procedures change often as you learn from experience and as you uncover an issue that perhaps you need to re-address or have failed to address.

Key Areas to Include:

1. **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

- >> *By doing research, you can identify the most widely accepted definition of terms. Be sure your terms are in line with the legal definitions in your state.*
- >> *Will you include in your definition of terms emotional and/or physical abuse and neglect?*
- >> *Remember that to include emotional and/or physical abuse and neglect will require that you properly train your staff and volunteers what the signs of abuse are and how the organization will respond to each form of abuse.*

2. **PREVENTION PROCEDURES**

Screening

- >> *Will you screen all staff and all volunteers or only some? Where does your greatest risk come from: staff or volunteers?*
- >> *Will you include both primary and secondary references on all staff and volunteers?*
- >> *Will you do national fingerprint-based background checks on all staff and volunteers?*
- >> *How will you cover the costs of background checks? Will the cost of background check be the primary factor in what type of background check you will have done?*

Training

- >> *Will you train 100% of all staff and volunteers in how to prevent, recognize and react responsibly to child sexual abuse?*
- >> *How often will you provide training?*

- >> *How will you handle training staff or volunteers who begin after your training?*
- >> *Will you provide training for parents and children and how often?*

Social Networking and Internet Use

- >> *Does your school consider it appropriate for teachers and students to have social networking connections? Does that give students who don't or are not allowed to use social networking sites an unfair disadvantage?*
- >> *Will you require that any social networking communication be printed and saved in the event of any accusation or inappropriate communication?*
- >> *How could you use social networking to provide children and youth a safe place to communicate to a staff person when they are in trouble or need help?*

One-on-One Time

- >> *In what situations do you need procedures as it relates to one-adult-one-child situations?*
- >> *Will you include one-child-one-older-child situations?*

3.

ACTING ON SUSPICION

- >> *How will you train your staff and volunteers on what to look for and how to respond to any suspicion of abuse?*
- >> *Do you have a procedure that ensures that the accused does not have further access to any child?*
- >> *To whom is a suspicion to be reported in your church or school?*
- >> *Will you demand the report be made within a specified time (such as 24 hours)?*
- >> *Will you require all verbal reports to be followed up with a written report?*

4.

INVESTIGATION

The reason for an internal investigation is to determine:

- >> *How the abuse occurred*
- >> *What you need to learn from this experience to better protect children in the future*
- >> *How your policy or procedure documents need to change*

- >> *What administrative outcomes should result for any staff, employee or volunteer involved*
- >> *When and how will you do your own internal investigation without interfering with law enforcement or the criminal prosecution of the offender?*

5.

OUTCOMES

Any internal investigation, combined with law enforcement investigation, should result in one of the following outcomes:

- >> *Sufficient corroboration to allegation*
- >> *No substance to allegation*
- >> *Occurrence of abuse confirmed / insufficient evidence to identify specific offender*
- >> *Inappropriate behavior, but not child abuse*
- >> *Insufficient evidence to confirm or deny allegation*

What administrative actions will you take when any of the above final outcomes is determined?

6.

COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE LARGER COMMUNITY

- >> *How will the administration communicate to the larger community such as the parents of the children who attend your school or church? What legally can you communicate?*
- >> *Will you include a protocol to inform other organizations if someone who is removed from your organization for violating your child protection policy seek to be hired or volunteer with another organization? What are your legal responsibilities and liabilities if asked for a reference on that individual?*

7.

MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

- >> *Will you have a procedure on who and what can be communicated to the media?*

8.

FOLLOW-UP CARE

- >> *How will you follow up with the family of the victim, others who have been impacted and even the family of the accused or perpetrator?*

Final Steps

To implementing safe policies and procedures

- >> *You must refer your document to your legal counsel for review. Will you also ask your insurance carrier to give approval?*
- >> *Are you required to include all the edits and advice provided by lawyers and insurance companies? What happens if you choose not to include a recommendation?*
- >> *Once you make your edits to your documents, you must have your leadership review in detail the documents and then agree to stand by them and enforce them.*
- >> *When will you begin your first trainings to insure your policy and procedures are in place and enforced?*
- >> *How often will you require that your documents be reviewed and updated?*

Adults Protecting Children provides a workbook that fills in all the details for writing policy and procedures documents. You may purchase this workbook by going to our website and click on the resource tab: <http://safekidsatchurch.com>

Adults Protecting Children, Inc.
is committed to the training of adults
in how to prevent, recognize and react
responsibly to child sexual abuse,
working with organizations in the
development and implementation
of child protection policies.



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