

SAFE Sanctuaries

for Children
.....
and Youth

.....
Reducing the Risk
of Abuse in the Church

DVD Study Guide



Part 2—How?

1. Abuse Prevention Policy

Review the sample “Abuse Prevention Policy” located near the back of your *Safe Sanctuaries* books in the forms section.

- In what ways does this sample policy fit the needs of your ministry situation?
- How would you need to revise this policy to make it specific to your congregation’s needs?

2. Self-Evaluation Checklist

Take time to complete the “Local Church Self-Evaluation Form” that is included near the back of your *Safe Sanctuaries* books in the forms section. If your group cannot answer “Yes” to each item, use the list to organize your plans for a new Safe Sanctuary policy. Begin to outline the actions you will need to take to make each item a reality for your church.

3. The Hiring Process

Position descriptions
Position application forms
Personal reference forms
Personal interview summary forms
Consent to criminal background check forms

Review this list of forms needed for the recruitment, screening, and hiring process.

- Which of the procedures associated with these forms are the top priority for recruiting and screening workers with children and youth?
- What makes each of these procedures useful to your congregation?
- What is the value of each of these procedures for your congregation?
- What is the cost of each of these procedures for your congregation?
- Which is better stewardship: paying the cost of criminal background checks for your workers with children and youth or paying the cost of litigation following allegations of abuse?

Review the information about this process on the video and in Chapter 3 of your *Safe Sanctuaries* books. Compare your answers with the information provided there.

4. Your State’s Requirements

For this discussion you will need complete information about

- your state’s statutes regarding the use of criminal background checks for workers with children and youth; and
- your church’s insurance company’s requirements for screening and recruiting workers.

Review and discuss these requirements, especially as they relate to the needs of your congregation.

Ask: How can we best provide information regarding our state’s child abuse reporting statutes to our teachers and workers with children?

5. Procedures for Operating Safely

Basic Safety Procedures

- ✓ Maintaining Appropriate Interpersonal Boundaries
- ✓ The Two-Adult Rule
- ✓ First Aid/CPR Training
- ✓ Annual Orientation for Workers
- ✓ The Five-Years-Older Rule
- ✓ No Workers Under the Age of Eighteen
- ✓ The Six-Months-Hospitality Rule
- ✓ Windows in All Classroom Doors
- ✓ Open-Door Counseling
- ✓ Limited Counseling Sessions
- ✓ Advance Notice to Parents
- ✓ Parent and Family Education
- ✓ Appropriate Settings
- ✓ Adequate Insurance for the Scope of Your Ministries
- ✓ Youth Group Web Sites

Turn to Chapter 4 in your *Safe Sanctuaries* books to review the information on each of these safety procedures.

Discuss how each one of these procedures fits into the plan for ministries in your congregation.

- Which of these procedures should be top priorities for operating safely?
- What makes each of these procedures useful for your congregation?
- What is the value of each of these procedures for your congregation?
- What changes will you need to make in order for your church to meet the requirements for being a Safe Sanctuary church?

- What does each procedure cost?
- How can you provide first aid and CPR training for your teachers and workers with children?
- How often will you provide educational events to be sure that families who join your church are informed about your policies?
- How will you ensure that you have adequate insurance coverage for your ministries?

Part 3—Reporting and Responding

1. State Reporting Statutes

Have copies of your state's child abuse reporting statutes for everyone in the group. Review the statutes to find how they define each of the categories listed here:

- mandatory reporters;
- permissive reporters;
- anonymous reporting;
- immunity for good-faith reporting;
- statutory definitions of abuse and child sexual abuse;
- reporting time limits; and
- possible criminal penalties for failure to report.

2. A Plan for Reporting and Responding

Consider what must be included in a plan that clearly defines how you will comply with legal requirements and make official responses in the event of some kind of abuse in your church. Consult your *Safe Sanctuaries* books (Chapters 5 and 8 in *Safe Sanctuaries* and Chapters 6 and 9 in *Safe Sanctuaries for Youth*). Talk together about the special circumstances that will need to be considered in each of these areas for reporting and responding:

- legal reporting;
- response to the victim;
- response to the victim's family;
- response to the news media;

- response to the church's insurance agent;
- response to the denominational authorities;
- response to the accused abuser; and
- response to the accused abuser's family.

When developing your reporting procedures, be sure to provide for immediately notifying the pastor in charge in the event of an incident or allegation of abuse—unless, of course, the pastor in charge is the person accused of abuse.

3. Other Victims

Review the list of victims of abuse other than the abused person. Take time to discuss possible ways to be in ministry with each victim. Simply brainstorming ideas will be a good beginning.

Other Victims

- Family members of the youth or child
- Peers of the youth or child
- Peers of the youth's or child's parents
- The other workers with youth and/or children
- The congregation as a community of faith
- The family of the accused abuser

If your group has difficulty with brainstorming, look to your conference staff members for assistance. Perhaps they can help you develop ideas for compassionate response or offer the assistance of the Conference Response and Intervention Team to help outline appropriate plans.

Real-Life Stories

Abuse in Your Community

Practically every day, we learn through the news media of incidents of abuse, and, unfortunately, too often the incidents have happened at the church. Review the newspapers of the past week in your community.

- How many reports of child abuse do you find?
- What criminal sentences have been given in your community in such cases?
- What civil monetary awards have been made in such cases?
- What have been the consequences for the congregations, schools, or other entities involved in these recent cases?

Choose one or two of the reports you find and ask the group to imagine that these incidents happened in your church. Then discuss:

- How could we have prevented this in our church?
- How must this be reported?
- How can we care for the victim(s)?
- What is the dollar amount of insurance coverage available to our congregation for this type of claim? (If you do not know, how can you find out?)

Then ask:

- What can we do to reduce the risk that something like this would actually happen in our church?

Next Steps

Your group should now be ready to begin working on the specifics of a Safe Sanctuary policy for your congregation. Use Chapter 6 in *Safe Sanctuaries* and Chapter 7 in *Safe Sanctuaries for Youth* to guide you in your work.

Be sure that your work includes

- a written policy to guide all of your work with children and youth;
- detailed recruiting policies, including written job descriptions, planned interviews, and background checks;

- policies that address the day-to-day safety issues related to children and youth and the adults who work with them;
- a plan for educating the entire congregation about your Safe Sanctuary plans;
- a detailed plan for reporting and responding to abuse if it happens;
- a time to celebrate the commitment your congregation has made to ensuring that its children, its youth, and its adult workers will be part of a Safe Sanctuary church.



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