



Alabama Baptist Convention  
**State Board of Missions**

# Protecting Children and Youth from Sexual Misconduct in Your Church

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**Employment and other laws are constantly evolving, and nothing contained herein should be considered legal advice. The reader should consult the church's attorney before carrying out or adopting any of the suggestions contained herein.**

(Revised 2012)

**This information is designed to help autonomous Baptist churches think through vital issues and formulate their own internal policies. This resource, like virtually all past and present resources from the State Board of Missions, is not binding on local congregations, which are entirely self-governing.**

## **Introduction**

Protecting children at church involves two large areas of concern. The first is prevention, which includes such things as having proper policies in place and worker screening. The second major area is proper supervision.

First, a few basic points about the problem itself:

- 1) Sexual predators come from all walks of life. A predator may be any age or socio-economic group, male or female. An offender may be an adult, a youth, or another child. Behavior should be observed and supervised.
- 2) Child molesters may be situational (opportunistic) with very few victims, or they may be predatory, having many victims. The situational offenders rarely show up on background checks. Even the predators often do not show up on background checks, because they manipulate victims not to tell.
- 3) In addition to any physical marks or evidence, we must observe behavior in children. Watch for changes in behavior, such as an outgoing child becoming withdrawn or a quiet child becoming aggressive.

## **Prevention**

When seeking a paid staff member (minister, director or coordinator), the following steps are suggested:

- 1) Check references
  - a) Carefully check at least five references when considering a staff member. Check three not listed on the resume.
  - b) Excellent reference resources include directors of missions, former staff members that have worked with the candidate, and church and community leaders from a former church. Do not contact anyone in the current church unless the candidate permits you to do so.
- 2) Look for gaps in ministry service.
- 3) Conduct an interview.
  - a) Include the spouse in the interview.
  - b) During the interview, secure written permission for a criminal background check and a credit check.\*
  - c) Ask character questions.
    - i) Have you ever been charged with or convicted of a crime?
    - ii) During your ministry, has your moral life been above reproach?
- 4) Conduct the criminal background check and a credit check.

\*Sample available at [www.alsbom.org/safe](http://www.alsbom.org/safe) or 800-264-1225, ext.263

## **Sexual Misconduct Policy**

Every church should plan to do what is best for preschoolers, children, and youth at church and in church-sponsored activities. These are suggested guidelines:

- 1) A sexual misconduct policy regarding working with preschoolers, children or youth should consider the following:
  - a) Leadership responsibilities with preschoolers, children, and youth are best carried out by adult members of the church.
  - b) A Six-Month Rule should apply to all. A person should not work with minors until he/she has been a member of the church at least six months. Most pedophiles do not want to wait that long. They want immediate access to children.
  - c) These policies should be applied to those requested by the church to drive vehicles transporting minors.
- 2) A screening procedure should be conducted for both paid and volunteer workers. This screening should include an application,\* an interview, and a child abuse/neglect report from DHR. A criminal background check should be required of paid workers and may be required for volunteers.

## **Supervision**

- 1) Follow church-approved security policies for preschool, children's, and youth ministries.
- 2) Age-group ministers, division directors, hall monitors, greeters, and/or program directors should be present in or near the children's classes. As they do their work, they should also observe teaching units (departments or classes).
- 3) Establish a Two-Adult Rule: Reasonable effort should be made to have two adult workers present or nearby with preschoolers, children, and students during church activities. Also assure that one adult is not left alone with one minor. A husband and wife working in the same room should be considered as one adult.
- 4) It is a good practice to install view windows or open doors for every teaching unit (department or class).
- 5) Establish a security system (check in/check out) for preschoolers and younger children. An example of how this might work: parents bring their child to the room, sign in their child and receive a card, and when they return for that child present the card. This can be as simple as a card you make yourself or something you purchase. Some of the purchased types have a two-part carbonless form of which the parent keeps one part and the copy stays in the room.

## **Responding to a report of child abuse**

- A person who observes or suspects abuse should report the incident immediately to the pastor, unless the pastor is implicated. From this point the pastor should guide the process.
- A lay leader of the church such as the deacon chairman should be notified as soon as possible.
- Notify parents of the victim.
- Consider outside assistance such as the associational director of missions or the Office of LeaderCare & Church Administration, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 263, at the State Board of Missions.
- Contact the proper civil authorities following the guidance of your attorney and insurance company. In Alabama, when child abuse or neglect is observed or suspected, it must be reported to the county Department of Human Resources orally and then followed by a written report. Questions regarding the reporting process can be answered by your county DHR or by

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calling 1-888-658-6585. An in-depth investigation should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases. Abuse must be reported. Ministers are mandatory reporters. The exception may be confidential communication with clergy (Alabama Rules of Evidence 505, Code of Alabama Section 26-14-3). If you are in doubt as to how this applies, contact an attorney. The protection of children is paramount. Therefore it is suggested that churches/ministers adopt and follow a policy of reporting suspected abuse.

## **Other considerations**

- Confrontation of the accused should not take place until the safety of the child or youth is secured.
- Discussions of this matter should initially be limited to a small and appropriate group.
- Do not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support helps prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority.
- Treat the accused with dignity and support. If the accused is a church worker, that person should be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the person is a church employee, compensation during the time of the investigation should be considered.
- Use the text of a prepared statement to inform the congregation, and, if necessary, make available to the news media. Be careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.
- Document all efforts at handling the incident.

\*Source for some guidelines, "*Reducing the Risk Resource Kit: Making Your Church Safe from Child Sexual Abuse*", James Cobble, *Church Law and Tax Report*, [www.reducingtherisk.com](http://www.reducingtherisk.com).

## **Resources**

It is hoped that these resources, presentations and documents will be informative and helpful to you but the State Board of Missions has not reviewed all material on the web sites and publications listed, will not monitor them for future additions or changes and therefore is not endorsing these resources.

[www.reducingtherisk.com](http://www.reducingtherisk.com)  
[www.churchvolunteercentral.com](http://www.churchvolunteercentral.com)  
[www.protectmyministry.com](http://www.protectmyministry.com)  
[www.bradley-personnel.com/church-background-checks](http://www.bradley-personnel.com/church-background-checks)  
[www.guideonecenter.com](http://www.guideonecenter.com)  
[www.churchmutual.com](http://www.churchmutual.com)  
[www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)  
[www.brotherhoodmutual.com](http://www.brotherhoodmutual.com)

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## **Other presentations and documents**

Alabama's Mandatory Child Abuse Reporting Law

Alabama Act 2003-272 – This legislation added clergy to the list of mandatory reporters.

Alabama Rules of Evidence 505 – This rule provides privilege to confidential communication to clergy.

"The Reporting Process: What to expect from DHR," James Long, Alabama assistant attorney general.

"ABI Resources to Combat Child Abuse & Neglect," Corporal Karl Youngblood, Alabama Bureau of Investigation.

*Better Safe than Sued*, Jack Crabtree, Zondervan 2008: "Detecting Staff Misconduct", pp. 57-ff. This resource relates specifically to youth and older children's ministry.

"Child Abuse Reporting & Clergy: On line Resource Guide". The site includes *Child Protection First!*,\* documents developed by attorney Tom Eden.

"Reducing the Risk Resource Kit: Making Your Church Safe from Child Sexual Abuse", James Cobble, *Church Law and Tax Report*, [www.reducingtherisk.com](http://www.reducingtherisk.com).

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# Conducting a Criminal Background Check

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Why is it necessary to conduct a background check on your church workers - employed and volunteer? Simply answered, "What you don't know can hurt you!" Certainly churches need to protect themselves from lawsuits (negligent hiring, negligent retention, negligent referral), but much more importantly churches must protect its members and guests, especially children and minors. The general assumption is that the church should know about previous behavior before hiring employees and enlisting volunteers. Background checks are an important tool for meeting this assumption. Churches are encouraged to conduct a background check before putting people – even volunteers – to work in sensitive areas, such as with preschoolers, children and youth. What should be done?

- 1) Receive written permission from the worker granting authorization to conduct a background check.** A standard authorization form is available from the State Board of Missions' Office of LeaderCare and Church Administration.
  
- 2) Select a background reporting agency to run the check.** Listed are several companies that provide such a service. Discuss with the selected company costs, coverage and application forms.
  
- 3) It is hoped that the web sites listed will be informative and helpful** to you but the State Board of Missions has not reviewed all material on the web sites, will not monitor them in the future and therefore is not endorsing them.
  - **Department of Human Resources:** A child abuse/neglect report though DHR is free. Contact your county or state DHR at 334-242-1425.
  
  - **ScreenNow:** [www.screennow.com](http://www.screennow.com) or 1-800-853-2414.
  
  - **Volunteer Central:** [www.churchvolunteercentral.com](http://www.churchvolunteercentral.com) or 1-800-267-9040.
  
  - **Single Source Services:** [www.singlesourceservices.com](http://www.singlesourceservices.com) or 1-800-713-3412.
  
  - **Employment Screening Services:** <http://www.es2.com/default.asp?ID=124> or 1-866-859-0143.
  
  - **LifeWay Stores** [www.lifewaystores.com/backgroundchecks](http://www.lifewaystores.com/backgroundchecks) or 1-800-464-2799.

Upon receiving the report, handle the information provided with extreme confidentiality. Only those requesting the background check should be allowed to see the information.

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## Confidential Volunteer Application

This application is to be completed by all volunteers for any position involving the supervision or custody of minors in church facilities or on church-sponsored activities. It will help our church family provide a safe and secure environment for all boys and girls who participate in our ministries and use our facilities.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Present Address \_\_\_\_\_ SSN \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (Evening) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (Day) \_\_\_\_\_

On what date would you be available to begin? \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a current driver's license?  No  Yes State \_\_\_\_\_ Driver license # \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been convicted of or arrested for any offense involving a minor?  No  Yes

If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been convicted of or arrested for a felony?  No  Yes

If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

I have read the *Child Protection First!*\* policy.  Yes  No

Have you engaged in conduct that would fall within the definition of child sexual abuse?  Yes  No

**(If you prefer, you may decline to answer the following question, or you may discuss your answer in confidence with one of the ministers rather than answering on this form. Answering yes or leaving the question unanswered will not automatically disqualify you.)**

Were you a victim of abuse or molestation as a minor or as an adult?  Yes  No

Initial here \_\_\_\_\_ if you are declining to answer this question.

Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

### Church Activity

When did you make your profession of faith in Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

Church member where? \_\_\_\_\_

**List other churches (name and city) you have attended regularly and service with minors: (use back if necessary)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**List any gifts, callings, training, education or other factors that have prepared you for teaching minors: (use back if necessary)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## Personal References (Not relatives)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Nature of association \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Work phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
Length of time known \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Nature of association \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
Length of time known \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

## Applicant's Statement and Agreement

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by \_\_\_\_\_ *Child Protection*  
(Name of Church)

*First!*\* policy and to refrain from unscriptural conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.

I have carefully read \_\_\_\_\_ *Child Protection First!*\* policy and this  
(Name of Church)  
application and state that the information I have provided is true and correct.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Applicant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### For Office Use Only

Member attending six months	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Personal interview satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Application satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Former church record satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Release satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Record check satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Personal references satisfactory	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No			

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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