



Alabama Baptist
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

***Helping Churches to
Be Safer Places***

Protecting Children and Youth from Sexual Misconduct in Your Church

(Revised 9/3/2019)

This piece focuses on protecting the church's children and youth against sexual misconduct.

There is a companion piece, *Preventing Adult Sexual Misconduct in Your Church*, which is available at www.alsbom.org/safe or 1.800.264.1225 , ext. 241 or 283.

Note: 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 any of the suggestions or adopting any of the policies contained herein.

This resource is made possible by the gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

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. Consult a qualified attorney when drafting your own policies.

1-Protecting by Knowing: Knowing abuse could happen

First, a few basic points about the problem itself:

- 1) There is no profile of a sexual predator, so we must observe behavior. We must supervise. A predator may be any age or socio-economic group, male or female. An offender may be an adult, a youth or another child.
- 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 to not tell.
- 3) In addition to any physical marks or evidence, we must observe behavior in children. Watch for a change in behavior – an outgoing child becomes withdrawn, a quiet child becomes aggressive, etc.

2-Protecting by Providing Boundaries: Policies

Screening and background checks are due diligence (commonly regarded as the minimum acceptable level of safety in selecting workers with preschoolers, children and youth at church and in church-sponsored activities).

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

3-Protecting by Preventing Access: Screening

Screening: Ministry Staff

When seeking a staff member (pastor, minister, director or coordinator), churches are encouraged to address the following:

- 1) The need for a written application [See page 9].
- 2) The need to check references.
 - a) Carefully check at least five references when considering a staff member.
 - b) Check at least three references not listed on the resume.
 - c) 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.
- 3) Researching prior church membership and work, especially with minors. Look for gaps in ministry service. If you find gaps, ask why they happened.
- 4) Conducting a personal interview with each applicant being considered.
 - a) Include the minister's spouse in the interview.
 - b) A good time to secure written permission for a criminal background check and a credit check is during the interview [See page 6].

- c) Asking a candidate for a verbal response to character questions will reveal helpful information. Write down the answers and especially non-answers. Churches are encouraged to address the following:
 - Have you ever been charged with or convicted of a crime?
 - Have you ever molested a child?
 - During your ministry, has your moral life been above reproach?
- 5) Conducting a criminal background check and a credit check. Screening and background checks are due diligence (commonly regarded as the minimum acceptable level of safety in selecting workers with preschoolers, children and youth at church and in church-sponsored activities) [See page 9].

Screening: Non-Ministry Staff

When seeking other staff members, churches are encouraged to address the following:

- 1) The need for a written application and screening form [See page 9].
- 2) The need to check references.
- 3) Researching prior church membership and work, especially with minors. Look for gaps in ministry service. If you find gaps, ask why they happened.
- 4) Conducting a personal interview with each applicant being considered.
 - a) During the interview is a good time to secure written permission for a criminal background check and a credit check [See page 6].
 - b) Asking a candidate for a verbal response to character questions will reveal helpful information. Write down the answers and especially non-answers. Churches are encouraged to address the following:
 - Have you ever been charged with or convicted of a crime?
 - Have you ever molested a child?
- 5) Conducting a criminal background check and a credit check. Screening and background checks are due diligence (commonly regarded as the minimum acceptable level of safety in selecting workers with preschoolers, children and youth at church and in church-sponsored activities).

Screening: Volunteers

When seeking a volunteer, churches are encouraged to address the following:

- 1) The need for a written screening form [See page 9].
- 2) Researching prior church membership and work, especially with minors. Look for gaps. If you find gaps, ask why they happened.
- 3) Conducting a personal interview with each applicant being considered.
 - a) Have you ever been charged with or convicted of a crime?
 - b) Have you ever molested a child?
- 4) Conducting a criminal background check [See pages 6-8] and a credit check.

4-Protecting the Safe Space: Supervision

Screening and background checks are due diligence (commonly regarded as the minimum acceptable level of safety in selecting workers with preschoolers, children and youth at church and in church-sponsored activities).

Churches are encouraged to address the following:

- 1) Church-approved security policies for preschool, children and youth ministries including those working with preschoolers, children or youth by driving vehicles transporting minors, as well as custodians, ministry assistants, food service personnel, and all others who will be near minors.
- 2) Churches are encouraged to have a **Two-Person Rule**.
 - a) This rule calls for at least **two non-related adults** as leaders or teachers of minors at all times, whether on or off the premises, in rooms, vehicles, or other enclosed spaces. A husband and wife working the same room will be considered as one adult for purposes of this policy.
 - b) This rule is designed to protect minors from abuse and workers from accusation.
 - c) Every reasonable effort will be made to assure that one adult is never left alone with one minor.
 - d) In situations where the Two-Person Rule is impossible or impractical, alternatives (such as a floating observer) should be considered.
- 3) Churches are encouraged to have an **Adults Only Rule**:
 - a) Only adult (age 19 or older) members of the church should be given leadership responsibilities with preschoolers, children and youth.
 - b) A lead supervisor or event director should be age 21 or older.
 - c) Consider that most insurance companies require drivers to be age 25 through 69.
- 4) Churches are encouraged to have a **Six-Month Rule**: A person should not work with minors until he or 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 preschoolers, children and youth. Having this rule is a helpful deterrent.
- 5) Churches are encouraged to have an initial screening procedure for both paid and volunteer workers. This screening should include an application [See page 9 for a pattern], an interview, and a child abuse/neglect report from the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR). A criminal background check should be required of paid workers and volunteers.
- 6) Age-group ministers, division directors, hall monitors, greeters and/or program directors should be present or nearby. As they do their work, they should also observe teaching units (departments or classes).
- 7) Install view windows or remove doors for every teaching unit (department or class).
- 8) Churches are encouraged to establish a security system (check in/check out) for preschoolers and younger children. Parents must 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. Electronic versions, including smartphone apps with code scanners are also available.

5-Protecting by Reporting Any Offense: Mandatory Reporting

In Alabama, when child abuse or neglect is **observed or suspected**, it must be reported to either local law enforcement or the county office of the Department of Human Resources (DHR). You must immediately report orally and then follow-up by a written report.

- Questions regarding the reporting process can be answered by your county DHR or by calling 1-888-658-6585.
- **The protection of children is paramount.** Therefore, it is suggested that churches and ministers adopt and follow a policy of reporting suspected abuse immediately. Do not wait until the next day.

Churches are encouraged to require any person who observes or suspects abuse to follow these guidelines:

- 1) Churches should **not attempt** to investigate a misconduct or abuse situation internally or on your own. Professional outside assistance is available from others such as your associational missionary or the Office of LeaderCare & Church Health at the State Board of Missions, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 263.
- 2) Immediately report the incident to your county DHR or contact the proper law enforcement agencies. Follow the guidance of your attorney and insurance company.
- 3) Report the incident immediately to your pastor, unless the pastor is implicated. From this point the pastor is a mandatory reporter and he should guide the process. **DO NOT WAIT** until the next day to do this.
- 4) A lay leader of the church such as the deacon chairman should be informed as soon as possible. The pastor assumes great risk by investigating alone. Involve a key layperson. Do not wait until the next day.
- 5) Temporarily relieve persons accused of sexual misconduct from leadership and service positions pending a thorough investigation and review of the circumstances.
- 6) Notify parents of the victim. Do not wait until the next day.

Other considerations

Normally, law enforcement should handle the **confrontation** of the accused. In no case should you confront the accused before safety of the child or youth is secured.

- 1) Discussions of this matter should be limited to a small and appropriate group while information is being gathered. Misinformation is worse than no information.
- 2) **Do not** prejudice the situation. **Do** take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family.
 - a) Showing care and support helps prevent further hurt.
 - b) Extend whatever pastoral resources that are needed.
 - c) Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority.
 - d) 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, consider compensation during the time of the initial investigation.
- 3) When it is time to inform the congregation, use the text of a prepared statement to inform them.
- 4) If it becomes necessary to inform the news media, use the text of a prepared statement. Be careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved while the gathering of information is ongoing.
- 5) Record in writing all your efforts at handling the incident.

Sources for these guidelines,

- *Reducing the Risk II: Making Your Church Safe from Child Sexual Abuse*, www.reducingtherisk.com
- MinistrySafe www.MinistrySafe.com
- Brotherhood Mutual www.brotherhoodmutual.com
- MinistrySafe www.MinistrySafe.com

Resources to Help Create Your Church Protection Policies

- www.alsbom.org/safe/
- Brotherhood Mutual (Protecting Children)
<https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/resources/child-safety/>
(all topics) www.brotherhoodmutual.com
- Child Protection First!
<https://alsbom.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/child-protection-first-policy.pdf>
- MinistrySafe www.MinistrySafe.com
- Reducing the Risk www.reducingtherisk.com
- SBC Resources for Sexual Abuse Prevention
<http://www.sbc.net/churchresources/sexabuseprevention.asp>
- Alabama Attorney General www.ago.state.al.us
- GuideOne Insurance members safety resources
<https://www.guideone.com/safety-resources>
- <http://store.churchlawtodaystore.com/sexofinch.html>
- Child Abuse Facts <http://www.safehorizon.org/page/child-abuse-facts-56.html>
- Alabama Victim Assistance www.victims.alabama.gov

Sources for Background Checks

- Bradley Personnel Consultants www.bradley-personnel.com/background-checks.html
- Employment Screening Services (screening including drugs and alcohol use)
<http://www.es2.com>
- LifeWay <https://www.lifeway.com/en/shop/services/church-administration/background-checks>
- MinistrySafe www.MinistrySafe.com
- Protect My Ministry www.protectmyministry.com
- Shephard's Watch Background Checks (formerly "Church Volunteer Central")
<https://www.group.com/category/ministry-resources/volunteer-management/shepherds-watch-background-checks.do>
- Single Source Services www.singlesourceservices.com

Conducting a Criminal Background Check

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 person to be screened thereby granting authorization to conduct a background check.

You should be supplied with the proper authorization form from the background check service. If they do not provide one, a simple authorization form is available from the State Board of Missions’ Office of LeaderCare & Church Health [See page 8].

2) Select a background reporting agency to run the check. Listed below are several companies that provide such a service. Discuss with the selected company costs, coverage and application forms [See *Sources for Background Checks* on page 6].

3) Upon receiving the report, handle the information provided with extreme confidentiality. Only the personnel committee and those requesting the background check should be allowed to see the information. Retain this information permanently in a secure location other than the individual personnel file (just as you would HIPAA information).

Application and Screening Form / Confidential Volunteer Information

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) _____

Occupation _____

On what date would you be available to begin? _____

Do you have a current driver's license? [Yes No]

State _____ Driver's license number _____

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

If yes, please describe:

Have you ever been convicted of a felony? [Yes No] If yes, please describe:

I have read the Child Protection 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.

Current Employer

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Church Activity

When did you make your profession of faith in Christ?

Where is your church membership? _____

List other churches (name and city) you have attended regularly and where you served with minors:

(use the back if necessary)

List any gifts, callings, training, education or other factors that have prepared you for teaching minors:

(use the back if necessary)

Personal References (Not relatives)

Reference Name

Nature of relationship _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (Evening) _____ Phone (Day) _____

Length of time known _____

Occupation of reference _____

Reference Name _____

Nature of relationship _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (Evening) _____ Phone (Day) _____

Length of time known _____

Occupation of reference _____

Applicant's Statement and Agreement

In exchange for consideration for my employment at [~~insert church name~~], should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Child Protection Policy and to refrain from unscriptural conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.

I have carefully read the Child Protection Policy and this application and I state that the information I have provided is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Applicant Signature

Date

For Office Use Only

Member 6 months attending	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	Personal interview satisfactory	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Application satisfactory	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	Former church records satisfactory	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Release satisfactory	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	Record check satisfactory	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Personal references satisfactory	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No			

Approved Signature

Date