

Child Safety Resources

Child safety at church is a complex and sensitive topic, so it can be tough to address. The resources in this document will help you think through how best to protect the children at your church.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Does my church really need a child protection policy?

Child sexual abuse is an enormous problem in our society. About 20% of children in the USA are sexually abused before they turn 18. It is also a big problem in the church, as recent years have shown. Events in the Roman Catholic Church have captured the most attention, but churches of every kind have been affected. A child protection policy is one of the best tools to help church officers and members prevent abuse, and to prepare to respond in a godly fashion when abuse is reported.

2. What is the purpose of a child protection policy?

The first purpose of a child protection policy is to protect the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the king and head of the Church. The care we show to children, and the integrity we display in responding to reports of child abuse, are some of the most important ways we can display his glory to the world around us.

The second purpose of a child protection policy is to protect the children of our churches. They are precious to the Lord and to us, and they deserve to be protected from the devastating harm of abuse.

The third purpose of a child protection policy is to protect our churches from legal liability. A good policy will help us to respond wisely to reports of abuse, and will also help us prove that we have not been negligent in caring for children. Protecting ourselves from legal action is not the primary purpose of a child protection policy, but it is a real benefit of diligence and attention in these matters.

The fourth purpose of a child protection policy is to protect the reputation of officers and members of our churches, by providing guidance for responding to abuse with biblical wisdom. Protecting our own reputation should not be our primary motivation in handling reports of abuse. Many credible reports have been wrongly dismissed out of a concern to protect reputations. Nevertheless, this is a real benefit of a thoughtful, clear, and biblically informed protection plan.

3. How should a child protection policy be publicized?

A child protection policy should be as public as possible. It is fitting to distribute it to church members, and to post it on a church website. Often people think that a child protection policy should be kept private, perhaps to avoid giving a negative impression to visitors. In fact, visitors with families are likely to be pleased that our churches have a good child protection policy.

4. How should reports of child abuse be handled?

First, all reports should be taken seriously. False reports are much rarer than many people think. Furthermore, because child abuse often happens in ways that are difficult to detect, any one report may provide a piece of information crucial for uncovering an abuser.

Second, it is proper to report suspected child abuse to civil authorities. Receiving such reports is part of the magistrate's God-given duty to enforce justice. Ministers should be aware that, under California law, they are mandated reporters with specific legal obligations to report suspected child abuse. For more information on mandated reporting, visit this site:

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/mandat/>

5. What is the most effective way to protect children?

The most effective way to protect children is to proactively educate them and their parents on matters related to safety and abuse. A child protection policy is especially valuable as one part of a wider effort to teach children and families how to recognize, avoid, and respond to abuse.

6. Does my church need to do background checks?

Most experts in child protection recommend background checks for youth workers as an important part of a child protection plan. These checks serve as a deterrent to potential abusers, by signalling that child safety is being taken seriously. They are also easy and inexpensive to obtain. Many agencies will provide a check for about \$20.

It is important to emphasize though, that background checks are not themselves a sufficient child protection measure, since the information they provide is only partial. Background checks should be one part of a broader child protection policy.

Books

- Deepak Reju, *On Guard* (New Growth Press, 2014). Reju is an elder at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC. This book is an excellent overview of the whole subject of child safety, and includes some guidance on developing a child protection policy.
- Basyle Tchividjian, *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide* (New Growth Press, 2017). Tchividjian is the founder GRACE ("Godly Response to Abuse in a Christian Environment"), an organization that works to help churches and para-church

organizations recognize, prevent, and respond to abuse. As a former child-abuse prosecutor, he is exceptionally well qualified in this area. This book is specifically focused on the process of developing a policy for your local church. It is the best guide available on the subject.

- Justin and Lindsey Holcomb, *God Made All of Me: A Book to Help Children Protect Their Bodies* (New Growth Press, 2015). This book combines biblical truth with expertise on child abuse. It is a wonderful resource for educating children and their families on how to prevent, recognize, and respond to abuse.

Articles and Websites

- “Resources” and “Common Questions” at the GRACE website (www.netgrace.org). These are exceptionally useful web pages.
- The June/July 2014 issue of *Ordained Servant* contains two articles and two book reviews that address the subject of child safety. https://opc.org/os.html?issue_id=96
- “Faithful Protection: Developing Your Church’s Child Protection Plan” by Beth Hart and Mike Sloan of Doulos Resources. This is a short but very thorough ebook on the subject of child safety. It includes templates that may be adapted for your church. http://www.doulosresources.org/resources/Child-Protection-Resources/Faithful_Protection.pdf
- A very well-written article from the current president of the Southern Baptist Convention, explaining how abuse victims can get help. <https://jdgreear.com/blog/700-not-total-number-get-help/>

Legal contact info

- Alliance Defending Freedom is a network of Christian attorneys who work on cases related to religious freedom. The ADF Church Alliance is a service they provide to churches, starting at \$250 per year. ADF attorneys will answer legal questions, review church documents, and represent a church in certain cases.
- One of the OPC Trustees, Lake Sherwood OPC ruling elder Stephen C. L. Chong from Florida, is an attorney and has assisted several churches with child protection policy matters. Steve may be contacted at schong@mateerharbert.com

Background check agencies

- Protect My Ministry - www.protectmyministry.com
- Live Scan - <https://oag.ca.gov/fingerprints/locations>
- Secure Search Faith - <https://securesearchfaith.com>

Sample policies

- First OPC Sunnyvale <https://firstopc.org/join-us/>
- Grace Fellowship Church Toronto <https://www.gfcdonmills.ca/our-abuse-prevention-policy>
- Covenant OPC Monterey Bay - <https://www.pcnopc.org/media/sample-childprotection.pdf>

Contact Info for Reporting Child Abuse

It is recommended that the local contact number for reporting child abuse be included in a child protection policy. This is a list of these contact numbers for the appropriate agencies in each county where our presbytery has a congregation.

Monterey County Department of Social Services
800-606-6618

Santa Clara County Family and Children's Services
833-722-5437

Tuolumne County Child Welfare Services
209-533-4357

Washoe County District Attorney
775-784-8090

Nevada Division of Child and Family Services
800-992-5757

Shasta County Child Protection Services
530-225-5144

Marin County Children and Family Services
415-473-7153

San Francisco County
800-856-5553

San Mateo Child Protection Services
800-632-4615

Placer County Children's System of Care
866-293-1940

Stanislaus County Child Protective Services
800-558-3665

Kings County Child Welfare Services
559-852-2000

Alameda County Social Services
510-259-1800

Contra Costa County Child Protective Services
877-881-1116