



# Safe Spaces for Children

HOW SAFETY WORKS FOR ALL OF US

# I hate this stuff...

Do any of these statements apply to you?

- I don't like having to discuss this topic.
- I don't like knowing I have friends who have been abusive.
- I don't like knowing friends of mine have been abused.
- I don't like having to consider that allegations of abuse may be true.
- I don't like thinking that friends/hero's could be abusers.
- I don't like having to defend my advocacy for victims.
- I don't like having to minister to victims and abusers.

# The Holy Spirit helps me

- ▶ Have the conversation.
- ▶ Listen to peoples' stories.
- ▶ Forgive my friends who may be flawed.
- ▶ Have patience with folks who fear prevention measures will harm our ministry.
- ▶ Pray with and for victims *and* their abusers.

# Why do we have to sit through this?

- ▶ Our most vulnerable brothers and sisters deserve protection.
- ▶ If everyone can recognize abuse, it's harder for perpetrators to hide.
- ▶ People charged with the care of our youth need to be reliable protectors of our youth.
- ▶ To protect our youth, we need to know there is a plan, that the victim can be OK, that the reporter can be OK and that the perpetrator can be OK.
  - ▶ So, what are the steps?

# Step 1 Learning the facts

- ▶ Christian communities can't harbor abusers. True or false?
  - ▶ How many churches can you think of that have been rocked by a scandal involving sexual abuse?
- ▶ 1 in 10 children are likely to have experienced sexual contact abuse before they turn 18.
- ▶ 35% of child victims are 11 years old or less.
- ▶ 9% of all 10 to 17 year olds receive unwanted sexual requests while on the internet.
- ▶ Child sexual abuse makes children more vulnerable to exploitation.

# Learning the facts

- ▶ You probably already know a child who has been or is being abused.
- ▶ You may also know someone who is an abuser
- ▶ 90% of victims know their abuser
- ▶ 30% of victims are abused by family members
- ▶ 60% are abused by someone the family trusts
- ▶ 40% are abused by older or more powerful children
- ▶ Only 10% or less are abused by strangers.

## Step 2 Minimize Opportunity

- ▶ Do background checks
- ▶ Familiarize yourself with the RCRC Safe Church document found on our website under the community tab
- ▶ Follow the RCRC Rules Of Conduct (section V C in the Safe Church Policy)
- ▶ Sign the RCRC Code of Ethics
- ▶ Avoid youth activities in hidden or secluded areas
- ▶ Strive to assure two safe adults are present for all activities
- ▶ Avoid isolated one-on-one activities, call for another adult or remain in view for private conversations
- ▶ Recognize signs (“grooming”, etc.) of abusive behavior among caregivers and report concerns to your supervisor, a counsel member or pastor ASAP.

# Minimize Opportunity

- ▶ Avoid situations where leaders are alone with children.
- ▶ If a child wants to talk alone, make sure you're within sight and sound of other people.
- ▶ Don't be the only person in the car with children not part of your family.
- ▶ Let children know they can object to activities that make them uncomfortable.
- ▶ No form of physical punishment is ever appropriate by a program leader.
- ▶ All programs are "open door". Parents and church members have a right to observe any youth activity.
- ▶ Protect yourself: Follow these guidelines to avoid an appearance of impropriety.

## Step 3 Be willing to talk about it

- ▶ Understand why children are afraid to disclose abuse
  - ▶ Abusers exercise power over their victims shaming them by telling them the abuse is the child's fault, that their parents will be angry with them or even that the abuser will harm the parents if the child tells.
  - ▶ Be careful not to respond negatively if a child tests the waters with you and begins to disclose abuse.
  - ▶ Talk openly with children.
  - ▶ Assure children that you are committed to protecting them.
  - ▶ Assure children that they have the right to object to anyone touching them in a way that makes them uncomfortable.
  - ▶ Assure victims that abuse is not their fault.

## Step 4 Recognize The Signs

- ▶ In some children there are no signs.
- ▶ Sudden withdrawal, anger, fear, or acting out can be indicators of abuse.
- ▶ Sexual behavior and/or language not age appropriate.
- ▶ Sudden drop in grades or lack of interest in usual activities.
- ▶ These signs don't always indicate abuse, but don't be afraid to reach out and ask if anything is bothering them in a way that indicates you're willing to listen.

# Step 5 React Responsibly

- ▶ When to react;
  - ▶ A child discloses abuse to us.
  - ▶ We discover abuse ourselves.
  - ▶ We have reason to suspect abuse

# React Responsibly

- ▶ How to react
  - ▶ If a child discloses abuse; *believe them*. Very few unsolicited disclosures are false.
  - ▶ Listen, let the child know you will protect them. Affirm their bravery.
  - ▶ If a child discloses abuse; report it to the authorities. They will conduct the investigation, it's not our job.
  - ▶ If Council receives an allegation of abuse, it will be reported to Law Enforcement or CPS.

# Follow-up Tasks:

- ▶ Read RCRC's Safe Church Policy – Pay close attention to the Rules of Conduct for All Workers in section V C (starting on page 6).
- ▶ Sign the Code of Ethics declaration.
- ▶ Contact the office to have your background check completed (this can generally be done over the phone).
- ▶ Review these documents each year or when ever you have a question.
- ▶ If you see inappropriate behavior, bring it to the attention of the person responsible for supervising that ministry, an elder or the pastor.

# Where to find the documents:

Documents referred to in this presentation can be found on the RCRC website [rochestercrc.org/community](https://rochestercrc.org/community) by scrolling down to the bottom of the community page.

## Church Policies

Guidelines for In-person Worship During COVID-19  
Request for General Building Use  
Wedding Guidelines  
Request for Building Use for a Wedding  
Cancellation Policy  
Safe Church 2019 Full Policy  
Safe Church Outline  
Incident Report Form  
Background Check Form  
Code of Ethics and Declaration Agreement Form  
Consent to Participate Form  
Photo Video Release Form  
Expense Reimbursement Form

# Resources

- ▶ Bivona Child Advocacy Center
  - ▶ 585-935-7800
  - ▶ [www.bivonaCAC.org](http://www.bivonaCAC.org)
- ▶ NYS Child Abuse Hotline
  - ▶ 1-800-342-3720
- ▶ 9-1-1
- ▶ Darkness to Light [www.d2l.org](http://www.d2l.org)
- ▶ [www.crcna.org/safechurch](http://www.crcna.org/safechurch)
- ▶ [www.samaritansafechurch.org](http://www.samaritansafechurch.org)

This presentation was prepared for RCRC based on church policy and drawing on d2l's Stewards of Children training workbook.

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