

Policy on
Reducing the Risk
of Child Physical and Sexual Abuse in Church



Indiana Ave. Baptist Church
Children's Ministry

September 2014

Reducing the Risk of Physical and Sexual Abuse in Church

“ . . . Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of Heaven. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.” Mark 10, 14-15

Children in Our Church

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And He (Jesus) called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said:

“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Matthew 18:1-6

Children are a precious gift from God, and they are full participants in the life of the Church and in the realm of God.

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to our children.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and physical abuse. He also calls us to create an environment where children as well as adults can be nurtured in their faith journey.

In response to this, the following document has been created, and subsequently updated and revised, to reduce the risk of child physical and sexual abuse in the church.

Acknowledging that the Threat is Real

The threat of child physical and sexual abuse in our community, and sadly, in our Churches, is real. Recent revelations about the depth of the problem of child sexual abuse by priests in the Catholic Church have alerted many to the potential dangers for children within our churches. Unfortunately, it is not limited to the Catholic Church.

A quick survey of research on sexual misconduct reveals an unfortunate number of incidents wherein Protestant pastors, staff, and lay workers have been accused of child sexual abuse.

Various organizations and services, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and The Administration for Children and Families' National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, report that there are more than one million and possibly more than two million incidents of child physical abuse and/or neglect per year in the U.S.; this affects up to 30 out of every 1,000 children.

The most up-to-date studies have estimated that between 1 out of 3 children are sexually abused. 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 7 boys has been sexually abused before the age of 18. Even more frightening is that these numbers may be underestimated since many children are reluctant to report abuse.

The National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse in the U.S. reports that 2000 deaths attributable to child abuse and/or neglect occur each year.

In light of the statistics, it seems that any organization involved with children is a place where abuse could occur.

What Is Abuse?

Types of Child Abuse

The depth and breadth of the problem of child abuse is far greater than can be effectively addressed within this resource. For our purposes, we must limit our focus to the prevention of child abuse in the church and its ministries.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child. Examples may include violent battery with a weapon (knife, belt, strap, and so forth), burning, shaking, kicking, choking, hitting with fists, and any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries to a child's body.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional Abuse is abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the child of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved but undeserving of love and care. Children exposed to emotional abuse may have experienced being locked in a closet, being deprived of any sign of parental affection, being constantly told they are bad or stupid, or being allowed or forced to abuse alcohol or drugs. Emotional abuse is often very difficult to prove but can be devastating to the victim.

Neglect

Neglect is abuse in which a person endangers a child's health, safety, or welfare through negligence. Neglect may include withholding food, clothing, medical care, education, and even affection and affirmation of the child's self-worth. This is perhaps the most common form of abuse.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is abuse in which sexual contact between a child and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth) occurs. The child is never truly capable of consenting to or resisting such contact and/or such sexual acts. Often, the child is physically and psychologically dependent upon the perpetrator of the abuse. Examples of sexual abuse may include fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to child pornography or prostitution.

Indicators of Child Abuse

Children suffering from abuse often will not tell anyone about it. Therefore, it is important to be able to recognize other signs of abuse. The following characteristics may be indicators of abuse, although they are not necessarily proof. Individually, any one of the indicators may be a sign of a number of other more or less serious problems.

When these indicators are observed in a child, they can be considered as warnings and lead you into the situation further.

Possible Signs of Physical Abuse

1. Hostile and aggressive behavior toward others.
2. Fearfulness of parents and/or other adults.
3. Destructive behavior toward self, others, and/or property.
4. Inexplicable fractures or bruises inappropriate for child's developmental stage.
5. Burns, facial injuries, pattern of repetitious bruises.

Possible Signs of Emotional Abuse

1. Exhibits severe depression and/or withdrawal.
2. Exhibits severe lack of self-esteem.
3. Failure to thrive.
4. Threatens or attempts suicide.
5. Speech and/or eating disorders.
6. Goes to extremes to seek adult approval.
7. Extreme passive/aggressive behavior patterns.

Possible Signs of Neglect

1. Failure to thrive.
2. Pattern of inappropriate dress for climate.
3. Beggars or steals food; chronic hunger.
4. Depression.
5. Untreated medical conditions.
6. Poor hygiene.

Possible Signs of Sexual Abuse

1. Unusually advanced sexual knowledge and/or behavior for child's age and developmental stage.
2. Depression – cries often for no apparent reason.
3. Promiscuous behavior.
4. Runs away from home and refuses to return.
5. Difficulty walking or sitting.
6. Bruised/bleeding in vaginal or anal areas.

7. Exhibits frequent headaches, stomachaches, and extreme fatigue.
8. Sexually transmitted diseases.

In addition to these indicators, children who have been sexually abused at church may exhibit some of the following:

1. Unusual nervousness or anxiety about being left in the nursery or Sunday School class.
2. Reluctance to participate in church activities that were previously enthusiastically approached.
3. Comments such as “I don’t want to be alone with _____” in reference to a childcare worker or teacher.
4. Nightmares including a childcare worker or teacher as a frightening character.
5. Unexplained hostility toward a childcare worker or teacher.

IABC Children's Ministry Guidelines

Supervisory Volunteer Staff

(Adult volunteers who serve on a regular schedule)

**** Includes Sunday School teachers, Awana, Music and Missions Wee Worship, and other volunteers working in new or ongoing ministries with children through 5th grade.**

All volunteers serving in a supervisory capacity for children shall meet the following criteria:

1. Be at least 18 years of age.
2. Must be a participant in an IABC group for at least 6 months. For those with less than 6 months participation, be willing to grant IABC permission to call his/her previous church for information.
3. Complete an authorization and consent form for a background check.
4. Be selected by a Staff member.
5. Participate in Reduce the Risk training once each school year (August – July). This can be attending an on-site training session each year - either a live training or viewing a recording. -or- Attend on-site training one year and review the policy, take the applicable quizzes, and sign a compliance form the next year.
6. Read and understand the IABC policy on reducing the risk of child physical and sexual abuse in the church, and sign a form certifying both.

Non-Supervisory Volunteer Staff (adult or youth volunteers who Serve occasionally-usually once a month)

All volunteers serving in a non-supervisory capacity for children shall meet the following criteria:

- Be selected by a staff member
- Youth must have permission from parent to volunteer.
- Adult or Youth must be supervised by a staff person or supervisory volunteer.

Supervision Guidelines

The following guidelines shall be used when planning supervision for all church gatherings where children will be in attendance. These guidelines apply to all activities and programs of Indiana Avenue Baptist Church (IABC), and to any programs or events that are held on the grounds of IABC with the permission of IABC, such as Boys Scout meetings, birthday parties and private or small-group lessons.

1. At least two employed staff and/or volunteer staff shall oversee any small group within the church buildings. In the event of only 1 adult, a roaming monitor that checks in on each program room regularly is required.
2. A married person cannot be compelled to testify against his/her spouse. Therefore, when a married couple volunteers with children there must always be another employed or volunteer staff member present.
3. Visitors must be authorized by a supervising staff person (Children's Minister, Associate Minister or Childcare Supervisor). A visitor is defined as someone who is not the parent of a child in the group or not on the class roster.
4. Children K and younger are not released on their own. They must be picked up by a parent or sibling. Children in 1st – 5th grade may only be released if Permission to Release form is on file with the church office and their nametag gives express permission to release.
5. Bathroom: K and younger - Stand in the doorway while helping children so that you can glance into the room to look and listen for any problems that may occur with other children. Never close the door to the bathroom while helping a child with bathroom needs. Bathroom: 1st grade and older – Send children one at a time to appropriate bathroom, monitor child's return. If sending more than one child to the bathroom, have adult stand at the bathroom doorway while children use the facility.
6. Diapers are changed only by trained staff members.
7. Children 5th grade and younger must be in a designated program area or be with a parent/guardian or in child care.
8. Off site functions for children through 5th grade require written permission from parents/guardians. Any spontaneous offsite gathering will require verbal permission from parents/guardians, obtained by the supervising person (Children's Minister or Associate Minister).
9. Every class has access to a telephone for emergency purposes.
10. Teachers are required to report any suspected child abuse to the Children's Minister. Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Minimum Standards for Child-Care centers §746.1201 require employees to report suspected abuse, neglect, and exploitation to DFPS as specified in the Texas Family Code, §261.101

Special Overnight Activities and Trips

1. Written permission from a parent/guardian shall be obtained for each child who is a part of a group participating in any overnight activity. Written permission is also required for any friends of children that wish to participate in an activity.
2. Offsite events for children or overnight events held at the church require the appropriate adult to children supervisory ratios indicated in the "Prevention Guidelines" section.
3. Two adults must always be present to protect both children and adults by providing a check on behavior and as witnesses in the event of accusations.
4. Adults are not to share beds with children.