

Abuse Prevention

Newsletter for Churches and Christian Organizations



Abuse Prevention Plan Checklist

The following seven (7) items are generally acknowledged by experts as essential elements in establishing an effective formal abuse prevention plan and are required by your insurance company in order to qualify for abuse coverage:

1 STATEMENT OF POLICY formally approved, implemented and periodically reviewed under the direction of your board members. It should confirm your organization's commitment to providing a safe environment for children and declare zero tolerance for abuse, harassment or neglect committed by any children's or youth ministry worker, including employees, members and volunteers. This policy should be expressed in terms of your organization's statement of faith, scriptural standards and the duty of care owed to children in our society. The declared purpose of the policy should be clearly expressed; that is, preventing harm to the children, youth and vulnerable adults in your programs and protecting your staff and volunteers from false or wrongful allegations.

2 DEFINITION of abuse and related issues so that all of your workers will clearly understand and be able to identify unacceptable behavior, including:

- PHYSICAL ABUSE
- SEXUAL ABUSE
- EMOTIONAL ABUSE
- CHILD NEGLECT
- HARASSMENT
- IMPROPER TOUCHING/DISCIPLINE

3 SCREENING all children's and youth ministry workers to a degree that is appropriate with their interaction with minors in your organization's care. Screening should also apply to personnel who have management authority and

power over other staff with respect to career advancement and performance review in order to discourage harassment. The following staff and volunteers must be subject to mandatory screening:

- All staff including paid and unpaid ministers and lay pastors
- All volunteers working with children, youth and vulnerable adults/seniors
- All board members, elders, deacons, trustees, directors and officers
- Designated monitors and care staff (refer to the "Who Should We Screen?" chart on Page Nine)

Effective screening for these individuals must include the following procedures:

- Targeted recruitment of personnel
- Employee and volunteer applications including ministry agreements and release for background references and criminal record checks
- Personal Interview
- Background reference checks
- Criminal Record Checks for all new workers 16 and over, prior to eligibility, including:

CPIC - Name-based Criminal Record Check done through the Canadian Police Information Centre
and

VSV - Vulnerable Sector Verification (also referred to as Screening, Scan or Check) including a query of Local Police Indices and National Pardoned Sex Offenders Database

Note: Checks must be original copies viewed within 60 days of issuance by police services

- Criminal Record Re-Checks for existing workers
 - Camping ministries and short-term missions organizations – Annually
 - Schools, daycares and nurseries – Every three (3) years or less
 - Churches and all other organizations – Every five (5) years or less
- Note:** Re-checks may be done by means of a CPIC and VSV or CPIC and FIP (refer to Page Eight and Nine)
- Minimum waiting period of 6 months or more for new volunteers regularly attending church services or volunteering with organization prior to eligibility to work with children or youth (refer to FAQ/Question #8)

4 OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES should be outlined in a written manual summarizing your organization's specific guidelines for preventing abuse and harassment, including:

- "Team" approach to children's/youth ministries
- Volunteers under age 18 may assist only under qualified adult supervision
- Off-premises contact during sponsored programs should be subject to signed parental permission and a "two-adult" rule at all times (Refer to **Good/Better/Best** Guidelines on Page Nine)
- Prohibiting corporal punishment
- Appropriate Youth Communication and Social Networking (refer to Page Eleven)

Abuse Prevention

Newsletter for Churches and Christian Organizations



- Addressing health, safety and sanitation issues for infants and toddlers in nursery programs, including protocol for illnesses, infections and emergencies, cleanliness of change tables, washrooms and floor surfaces and safety of toys, cribs, etc.
- Avoiding activities that could easily lead to allegations of abuse or harassment, such as individual photography of children, unsupervised internet access, vehicle transportation by workers alone with unrelated youth. Sleepovers, camping or other overnight events should only be allowed when all supervisors and volunteers are fully screened.
- Having all workers sign a ministry covenant confirming they have read, understood and are willing to comply with policies and procedures
- Keeping documentation on file indefinitely for all workers (refer to FAQ/Question #9)
- Obtaining signed parental consent and permission for off-premises or overnight events
- Sufficient qualified supervision of children outside and in public places (e.g. parks, playgrounds, libraries, amusement parks, etc.) at all times
- Incident reporting forms must be completed for all cases of injury or suspected abuse
- Internal or external audit to ensure Abuse Prevention Plan compliance (refer to Page Twelve)

- 5 PREMISES** modifications or alterations to your facilities which can assist in preventing and discouraging abuse incidents, including:
- Windows in classroom doors and/or open door policy for Sunday School and boys' and girls' clubs
 - Designated monitors circulating periodically from room to room for

- surveillance and to protect against false allegations
- Controlled access/entry and signing infants and pre-Grade 1 age children in and out of sponsored activities
- Adequate lighting inside and outside of building where children's activities take place
- Appropriate design of washroom and shower facilities and/or appropriate supervision of washroom breaks (refer to FAQ/Question #3)
- Locking rooms and closets when not in use during children's programs

- 6 TRAINING** for all staff members and volunteers who regularly work with children and youth to assist in the prevention of abuse through the following means:
- Initial formal training, including in-house video and DVD presentations (or online training) and distribution of handbooks or pocket guides containing a summary of prevention policies and procedures for all workers for their reference
 - Educating workers about their legal obligation to report suspected abuse and to recognize and identify the signs and symptoms of abuse and molestation
 - Follow up with refresher courses or sessions that emphasize the Operation Procedures, Premises and Reporting requirements (refer to Items 4, 5 and 7 in the 7-Point Checklist). Refresher training can be done at any time including during monthly staff, teacher or volunteer worker meetings. Many churches conduct an annual review of their prevention plan for workers at the beginning of their children's and youth program year in September or October.
 - Reviewing the ongoing suitability of existing workers including updated

criminal record checks (Refer to Section 3 Screening for frequency of re-checks)

- 7 RESPONDING** to all allegations or complaints of abuse in an appropriate manner, including the appointment of individual(s) designated to respond to allegations in the following manner:
- Completing incident reporting forms for suspected abuse or injury
 - Satisfying statutory legal obligations by reporting all cases of suspected abuse to police authorities and/or child protective agencies
 - Consulting a lawyer for advice
 - Without admitting legal liability, express your organization's concern to the complainant and their families and assure them of your commitment in assisting the investigation
 - Assuring confidentiality for the benefit of both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator
 - Immediately suspending the alleged perpetrator from children's or youth ministry duties without presuming guilt, pending outcome of police investigation
 - Avoiding public statements to individuals, the media or from the pulpit, without obtaining legal counsel
 - Contacting your insurance agent or broker to report the incident in order to satisfy the statutory conditions of your liability policy and to avoid jeopardizing your legal defense and coverage response

Don't try to triage suspected abuse incidents. Just as you don't wait to call the fire department when a building is on fire, you also don't wait to report abuse. The responsibility to report suspected abuse is the law in Canada!