



# Faithful Protection

## Developing Your Church's Child Protection Plan

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## A Note from the Authors

I (Mike Sloan) am a pastor in the *Presbyterian Church in America* (PCA) and oversee my church's ministries to students and children. I have worked and volunteered in student ministry for eighteen years. I have been married for twelve years, and I have five children.

I (Beth Hart) have worked and volunteered in student ministries for fourteen years. I have been married for seven years to a PCA pastor, and I have two children.

We both have Master of Divinity degrees from Covenant Theological Seminary, and are both trained to facilitate a child sexual abuse prevention course called *Stewards of Children*.<sup>1</sup> We are also brother and sister (biologically as well as spiritually). We are *not* trained as lawyers, social workers, or counselors. We are *not* writing as experts on preventing child sexual abuse in the local church. We *are* writing as ministry leaders in the local church who have sat under the wisdom and research of experts and who have sought to apply what we learned in the trenches of daily ministry in the local church.

Our hope in writing this guide is that you will join us on this path of learning and implementing sound principles for protecting children in your local church. Some of you might be tempted to skip ahead and simply use the sample child protection plan for your church. We encourage you to use these samples for your church, but urge you first, please: take the time to think and reflect on the principles behind solid child protection measures. Without this reflection, your documents will be of limited use. The learning curve in child sexual abuse prevention is steep, but worthy of the time and effort it requires.

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1 *Stewards of Children* is produced by *Darkness to Light*. We highly recommend this two-hour training for your local church or other organization serving children and/or youth. To find a trained facilitator in your area or take the training online, go to [www.D2L.org](http://www.D2L.org).

# Introduction

Several years ago, something happened to us that profoundly changed the way that we minister to children and students. For years, we volunteered, interned, directed ministries and pastored children and families. We were seminary-trained professionals with a lot of experience. Then, independently, we were invited to a seminar on preventing child sexual abuse.

One seminar ignited years of studying and practicing child protective measures in our churches and families. Before intentionally studying child sexual abuse, we had brushed up against it many times but knew little to nothing about it. We had worked under many different models of ministry that addressed child protection with varying degrees of intentionality and effectiveness. We had handled child protection issues well, and had also handled them poorly. However, we never knew why some measures worked and others did not. Before studying child sexual abuse, it felt like we had to cross our fingers, hold our breath, and hope that sexual abuse never happened in our ministries. At the seminars and through our personal study, we learned, instead, that adults can greatly reduce the instances of child sexual abuse.

To put ourselves through school, we both worked for a large, national bank as part-time tellers. Before the bank allowed us access to our cash drawers or any customer information, we went through an extensive screening and training process. We submitted character references and personal information for a background check. We attended over two weeks of in class and on-the-job training. The bank, understandably, wanted to protect its valuable assets.

In the church, our children are much more valuable than all of this large bank's money. We can protect children with as much diligence and care. To do so, pastors and ministry leaders do not need to be experts to prevent child sexual abuse. Instead, they need to learn about child protection and implement sound prevention principles. When compassionate and courageous adults use their God-given authority to help children, prevention with excellence can become a reality in the local church.

# I. Getting Started

## A Difficult Issue

Like many other ministry leaders, we spent years working in the church without knowing about child sexual abuse prevention. What makes abuse prevention so difficult to teach about and implement? The obvious answer is that child sexual abuse is a horrific sin with devastating consequences. Child sexual abuse involves an adult or older child using a child for foreplay and/or sex. We tend to avoid such an uncomfortable topic, and admitting that children in our local church are at risk is a painful thought to consider. Moreover, as ministry leaders, we often have had extensive training in exegesis, theology, and counseling with no training in abuse prevention. Acknowledging that we may not be well-equipped to protect our children is an overwhelming confession. Thankfully, leaders who are willing to learn and adapt to best practices can set aside their own insecurities and prioritize the needs of vulnerable children.

## The Present Reality

Many tragic news stories, such as the events at Penn State University, are opening our society's eyes to this problem and illustrating children's need for protection. What is the present reality about child sexual abuse in our culture? The most conservative studies estimate that one in ten children will be sexually abused before their eighteenth birthday,<sup>2</sup> and yet this estimate does not include instances of non-contact sexual abuse such as child pornography. An adult retrospective study by the Centers for Disease Control (that accounts for all forms of child sexual abuse) found that one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before their eighteenth birthday.<sup>3</sup> As a comparison, roughly one in fifty children suffers from a peanut allergy. No matter what statistic is used, the numbers are staggering. Recently, a campus minister told me (Mike) he was ministering to seventeen students who have disclosed child sexual abuse. In our churches, both of us have met and ministered to many victims.

In an overwhelming amount of cases, children know their abuser. In fact, about 90 percent of victims of child sexual abuse are violated by someone they know and trust.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the Department of Justice estimates that there is one pedophile for every square mile in the U.S.<sup>5</sup> As we will elaborate upon later, these predators often leverage their knowledge and trust to gain access to children in vulnerable, isolated situations where the abuse can take place. Research shows about 80 percent of child sexual abuse happens in one-adult, one-child scenarios that are completely isolated from other (respon-

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2 Townsend, C., Rheingold, A.A., (2013). *Estimating a child sexual abuse prevalence rate for practitioners: A review of child sexual abuse prevalence studies*. Charleston, S.C., Darkness to Light.

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/ace/prevalence.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ace/prevalence.htm)

4 Finkelhor, D. (2012). *Characteristics of crimes against juveniles*. Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center. Also, Julia Whealin, Ph.D. (2007-05-22). "Child Sexual Abuse". National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, US Department of Veterans Affairs.

5 Salter, Anna C. *Predators, Pedophiles, Rapists, and Other Sex Offenders: Who They Are, How They Operate, and How We Can Protect Ourselves and Our Children* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), x.

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sible) adults or where visibility and accountability are low.<sup>6</sup> Any situation where one adult or older child is with a child should be highly visible and other adults should be able to interrupt at any time. The stranger in the park does not pose the greatest threat to our children. Instead, we must always remember that the greatest threat is the wolf in sheep's clothing.

### **The Devastating Toll of Abuse**

Child sexual abuse harms children emotionally, mentally, physically, socially and spiritually with effects lasting long into adulthood. There are devastating ripple effects throughout society. We should not be surprised that heinous sin comes with a heavy price. It is estimated that the yearly economic fallout of child sexual abuse in the U.S. is 35 billion dollars;<sup>7</sup> imagine the equivalence in spiritual currency.<sup>8</sup> Children who are sexually abused are more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.<sup>9</sup> They also experience health threats such as obesity, diabetes, cancer, stroke and heart problems at a greater rate than their peers.<sup>10</sup>

Creating safe churches for children takes hard work, but the result is worth the effort. These realities about the prevalence, circumstances, and toll of child sexual abuse should humble us and call us to action. This information must inform how we relate to children and how we minister in the local church. But how?

### **Equipping Churches to Respond Faithfully**

Increasing awareness about the present danger of child sexual abuse will shine a light on this devastating problem in our culture and in the church. A cloud of shame overshadows this issue and silences healthy communication about child sexual abuse. Acknowledging that such traumatic sins take place in Christ's church and among his people is hard. Admitting that likely 20 percent of the children in our care have been, are being, or will be sexually abused is devastating. But the more we admit this reality, talk about it, and take informed actions, the more we can lead our church to pull back the shroud of shame and silence. It sounds simple, but talking about child sexual abuse with accurate information is a first step towards prevention because the devastating facts wake us up from our ignorance and demand action.

Because we believe in the God-given dignity of children, the church should lead the way in following safeguards. In the 1950s, people rarely used seat belts or special car seats for children. Today, however, the law requires drivers to buckle up and also strap children into their car seats. Such practices have become a part of our culture and no one questions

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6 Finkelhor, D. (2012). *Characteristics of crimes against juveniles*. Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center.

7 Fang, X., Brown, D., Florence, C., Mercy, J. (2012) "The economic burden of child maltreatment in the United States and implications for prevention." *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 36:2,156-165.

8 For an expert glimpse into the spiritual damage of abuse see, "The Spiritual Impact of Abuse" by Dr. Diane Langberg, available at [www.netgrace.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Spiritual-Impact-of-Abuse.pdf](http://www.netgrace.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Spiritual-Impact-of-Abuse.pdf)

9 Saunder, B.E., Kilpatrick, D.G., Hanson, R.F., Resnick, H.S., & Walker, M.E. (1999). "Prevalence, case characteristics, and long-term psychological correlates of child rape among women: A national survey." *Child Maltreatment*, 4, 187-200.

10 Sachs-Ericsson, N., Blazer, D., Plant, E.A., & Arnow, B. (2005). "Childhood sexual and physical abuse and 1-year prevalence of medical problems in the National Comorbidity Survey." *Healthy Psychology*, 24, 32-40.

## *I. Getting Started*

their importance. Child protection in the church should become as routine as buckling our children into seat belts simply because we all know it is safer to buckle up. Church leaders can create similar environments where adults are equipped to know what's in children's best interests and follow child protective measures. Tragically, many churches today are lagging behind instead of leading the way. Following well-informed and established practices for child protection must become a part of our service to Christ as we join his efforts to prevent anyone from harming a precious child.

### **The Key Components to a Faithful Response: Humility and Courage**

Child protection measures function best in a church environment that embodies both **humility** and **courage**. When church leaders humbly acknowledge the problem and courageously take responsibility for protecting children, they create a safer environment for children. Humility involves a willingness to learn from studies, lawyers, and counselors who have worked in child protection. Humble church leaders admit their vulnerability and that child sexual abuse could happen in our churches and in our families. Embracing humility allows us as ministry leaders to lay aside our insecurities so that we can focus upon children's needs. Then, as we pursue child protection, many situations will arise where we will need great courage. Courage counteracts the climate of secrecy and shame that engulfs child sexual abuse. As we break through the darkness of child sexual abuse, we will see situations that will require the courage to act for the sake of the little ones Jesus loves.

## II. Biblical Principles

### The God of Light

Why is Jesus so passionate about nurturing and protecting children? Fundamentally, it is because the God of the Bible is a God of moral clarity.<sup>11</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that we cannot know God unless we understand that he loves justice and hates oppression (Psalm 10; Psalm 99:4). God hears the prayers of the oppressed and responds with compassionate action (Psalm 9:9). The apostle John summarizes Jesus' teaching, "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5). The metaphor of light richly captures the radiant beauty of God's purity. All of his works shine with moral beauty. Jesus inaugurated a kingdom where justice and peace will multiply and fill the earth (Isaiah 9:1-7; Luke 4:18-19), a kingdom that reflects the light of his character. Jesus' kingdom is not neutral toward violence and oppression, "but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins" (Isaiah 11:4-5). God's moral beauty benefits all of his people, including children.

### God's View of Children

In the scriptures, God unfolds a rich theology of children and their special place in his sight. From the Bible's opening chapter, God declares the value and dignity of children as human beings made in his own image (Genesis 1:27). God affirms that the children of his people are members of his covenant and one of his most precious gifts (Genesis 17:7; Psalm 127:3). God prioritizes children's spiritual development by outlining the responsibilities and efforts Christian communities must devote to children (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Jesus' life demonstrates God's love for children, placing children at the center of his kingdom (Mark 10:13-14).

Conversely, Jesus reserves some of his harshest words for those who diminished the value of children. Jesus publicly rebuked his disciples in righteous anger when they tried to prevent children from coming to him (Mark 10:14). He pronounced the most serious woe upon those who would cause a child to stumble, saying, "It would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:5-6) The act of harming a child is a direct affront to the God who made that child in his own image.

### The Vulnerability of Children

Harm done to children also angers Jesus because he knows that children are powerless to stop it. Despite their inherent dignity, children occupy a vulnerable place in life. Children are in the process of developing spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally. As they learn and grow, they are often unable to defend themselves against physical threats to

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11 Haugen, Gary A. *Good News about Injustice* (IVP Books, 2009), 99.



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their well-being. And their vulnerability extends far beyond the lack of physical strength. Children are in a period of formation where their understanding of God, right and wrong, sexuality, and more is both extremely limited and malleable. They are not simply naïve; they are constantly being molded. Children are likely to believe what older children and adults tell them. Adults who interact with children must understand the great responsibility they bear to shape children in truth and love. Ministry to children is a high calling. Sadly, many adults misuse this responsibility, using lies and manipulation to prey upon vulnerable children.

### **The Abuse of Power**

One of the Bible's central ethical themes is that those with power and authority must not take advantage of the weak and vulnerable. Scripture bluntly acknowledges the bent we have toward using our power for our own sinful ends. The powerful can easily target those with little power whether physically, economically, politically, or spiritually. God knows an imbalance of power can easily turn to sin and so he commands throughout the Law, "You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child" (Exodus 22:21-22; cf. Deuteronomy 27:19). The poor, the sojourner, the widow, the disabled, and the orphan are all vulnerable and extremely easy targets for those with power and authority. These are common categories of vulnerable people in the Old Testament. Again and again, God impresses upon his people to reflect his love and care for the vulnerable (Deuteronomy 24:17; Leviticus 19:13-15; Deuteronomy 14:28-29; Deuteronomy 16:10-14). The God of light promises judgment for those who oppress the vulnerable, even if that means judgment upon his own people (Amos 4:1; Isaiah 1:17-24; Jeremiah 5:26-29; Ezekiel 22; Zechariah 7:9-12). Why does God oppose his people so strongly when they so sinfully abuse their power?

### **God's Children of Light**

The abuse of power contradicts the heart of the gospel. In the gospel, Christ who has all power used it to serve and rescue us. When we abuse power, we take the power we have and use it to further our own wicked ends. Jesus laid down his life to re-create us into his image, the image of the one who glorifies God by using his power for the good of others (Colossians 3:10, 17; cf. Deuteronomy 10:17-19). As the redeemed sons and daughters of the God of light, it should be no wonder that God calls us to walk as "children of light" (Ephesians 5:8-9; cf. John 12:35-36). As children of light, we must learn to use power like our Lord.

Scripture exhorts anyone with authority over the weak to use that authority to protect them and vehemently condemns anyone, particularly spiritual leaders, who use their authority to harm the vulnerable. Ezekiel strongly condemns the shepherds who use their power to prey on sheep (Ezekiel 34:1-10). In Proverbs 31:8, King Lemuel's mother realizes her son wields tremendous power. She wisely exhorts him not to use his power to indulge in excess, which is the way of the world, but to use his power redemptively, to "open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute." Psalm 72:4 outlines the duties of a powerful and godly king who anticipates King Jesus by saying, "May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor!"

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Notice that as children of light, it is not enough to personally refrain from injustice. We are called to use the power we possess to stand up for the vulnerable. Job vividly describes the use of his political power and influence for good by taking up the cause of the vulnerable in Job 29:7-17:

When I went out to the gate of the city, when I prepared my seat in the square, the young men saw me and withdrew, and the aged rose and stood; the princes refrained from talking and laid their hand on their mouth; the voice of the nobles was hushed, and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard, it called me blessed, and when the eye saw, it approved, because I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him. The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know. I broke the fangs of the unrighteous and made him drop his prey from his teeth.

Job begins by describing the respect and influence he commanded in the community. He then describes how he continually used that power to protect the vulnerable. He says he walked through a world of darkness by the light of God's ways (Job 29:3). What a blessing God's people are when they use their power to protect the weak! Think of the work Christians engage in around the world today as they fight against modern day slavery, work to educate children, and bring clean drinking water to the poor. Yet many in the world and in the church without power are still waiting for a Job to intervene for them (Ecclesiastes 4:1). When we intervene on behalf of the vulnerable we are reflecting the moral beauty of our God. As Job describes, it is as if we are putting on the clothing of God's own righteousness and justice to benefit others so they can marvel at our glorious God (cf. Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10ff.). When we remain silent, or we abuse power by harming the vulnerable, we are denying the glorious moral purity of God. This is why God takes the abuse of power to exploit children so personally.

### **A Choice for Today**

The God of light calls his children to shine today. To borrow an illustration from Dr. Diane Langberg,<sup>12</sup> a healthy body receives and responds to the signals from its head. We, as the body of Christ, are called to respond to the signals of our head, the Lord Jesus, who has all authority and power and yet uses it to serve the weak. On the other hand, a body with a condition so severe that it does not respond to signals from its head is not healthy. If we, as the body of Christ, do not respond to the words of Christ our head about protecting and welcoming children, then we are a very sick body. We have a choice in our time. This is not an easy choice. No one enjoys thinking about horrific things like child sexual abuse and how abusers operate. All sin is dark and ugly. However, we serve a God of light who enters the darkness for the sake of the helpless. And when Jesus sends us to dark places to bear his light, he sends his presence with us (Matthew 28:18-20).

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12 "Sexual Abuse in Christian Organizations" by Diane Langberg, 21 (available at [www.netgrace.org/resources/](http://www.netgrace.org/resources/))

# III. The Dynamics of Abuse

## Starting Principles

If only we could identify abusers by their outward appearance. But no one can look at another person and determine whether they will abuse a child. The reality is, predators are often trusted, well-liked, and respected people in their communities.<sup>13</sup> And they are also master manipulators; they deceive and disarm suspicion, intentionally building up trust so they can abuse that trust without detection. Often, abusers are religious because religion is a perfect platform for such egregious acts of deception. As one man noted:

I want to describe a child molester I know very well. This man was raised by devout Christian parents. As a child he rarely missed church. Even after he became an adult, he was faithful as a church member. He was a straight-A student in high school and college. He has been married and has a child of his own. He coached Little League baseball. He was a choir director at his church. He never used any illegal drugs. He never had a drink of alcohol. He was considered a clean-cut, all-American boy. Everyone seemed to like him. He was a volunteer in numerous civic community functions. He had a well-paying career job. He was considered “well-to-do” in society. But from the age of 13 years old he sexually molested little boys. He never victimized a stranger. All of his victims were friends....I know this child molester very well because he is me!<sup>14</sup>

Abusers are found in every age range, gender, race, economic status, social status, and religion. If ministry leaders cannot look at outward appearances, how can we protect children in our care? Instead of looking at outward appearances, we set up protective boundaries around children that minimize opportunities for abuse and then look for signs of abuse. When we understand what abusive behavior entails and we see that behavior, we must respond appropriately.

A friend of ours uses an example from deer hunting to illustrate the concept. When hunters seek a good hideout to spot deer, they do not look for deer. Instead, they look for signs of deer such as hoof prints, antler rubbings, and droppings. When hunters see these signs, they know that deer are close. Likewise, ministry leaders must look for behavior in adults or older children that raises red flags and may signal that children are being abused. Leaders must implement a child protection plan that minimizes such behavior for all adults and respond when the plan is broken. What are these signs of abuse?

## How Abusers Operate

Remembering that abusers are almost always people in positions of trust who know the child, abusers take advantage of the trust they earned to gain access to a child. Children are actually more vulnerable to the people we know than strangers, exactly because they

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13 Salter, 31-45.

14 Ibid., 36.

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are people we know.<sup>15</sup> Predators manipulate and disarm with a façade of generosity and kindness. Dr. Rick Perrin, a pastor and the chairman of the board of World Reformed Fellowship, says, “A pedophile rarely kidnaps a child off the street. Their preferred mode of operation is to infiltrate a group of good people—a church, a sports camp, a family center. They identify the most vulnerable children. They isolate them. They groom them. They molest them. They terrify them into silence.”<sup>16</sup> Abusers are smart. They are good at avoiding detection so they are rarely caught in the act. Instead, we must look for the signs of grooming and boundary violations that signal danger.

It is important to know what grooming behavior looks like. Pedophiles groom both children and any adults who might protect those children. In the grooming process, abusers lower defenses and with false intentions, develop the veneer of a trusting, nurturing relationship. When grooming adults, pedophiles often set adults up to feel as if they are in the abuser’s debt. Predators offer to babysit; they give gifts; they tutor; they pay for special activities. Often they use their position to disarm suspicion—they are pastors, teachers, coaches, and choir directors. Abusers invest great effort to lower adults’ defenses and make any adult who can protect a child feel comfortable. Pedophiles will often make adults feel guilty if those adults insist on accountability or question their behavior. Instead, when adults have access to children in vulnerable positions, those adults must have accountability. Any time an adult feels entitled to time with a child, especially time in a vulnerable place, this should raise red flags in a ministry leader’s mind. Being in a child’s life is a privilege, not a right.

When grooming children, an abuser’s behavior can take many different forms. Some pedophiles find out what interests a child and often shower gifts and special attention upon a child. Or they lure children into isolated places, using that knowledge. In an abuse prevention training class that we teach, a young woman tells a story about how her swim coach simply found out she liked frogs. After swim practice, her coach told her that he found a frog behind the bleachers. She excitedly came with him to this isolated place, and the coach abused her there.<sup>17</sup> Children are so vulnerable, any little bit of personal knowledge can be turned into a devastating weapon against the child.

In the grooming process, pedophiles will also test boundaries with children and parents to see if anyone stops them. Often their first physical contact with a child will seem innocent such as a hug that lasts a little longer than normal or an offer to massage a child’s feet. Abusers will then slowly increase the inappropriate contact, slowly disarming the child’s defenses and testing whether any other adults will stop them. Children should be taught and encouraged to say “no” to physical contact that makes them feel uncomfortable. Environments where children cannot say no to physical contact are environments where abuse can go undetected.

Abusers can also look for children and families in vulnerable situations. A child who is not accepted by his peers, a child who is lonely or depressed, or a child with a difficult home situation are all vulnerable targets for the attention of an abuser. Families under a variety of stresses and difficulties can be targeted as well. Families facing serious illness,

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15 Ibid., xii.

16 Rick Perrin, “The Carnage of Child Sexual Abuse,” blog post available at <http://wrfnet.org/articles/2013/11/wrf-board-chairman-rick-perrin-laments-carnage-child-sex-abuse>.

17 *Stewards of Children* abuse prevention training is available online at [D2L.org](http://D2L.org).

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underemployment, or single parent homes are often vulnerable because they are in need of more support. Abusers can easily step in to fill real needs by giving rides, tutoring, or baby-sitting. These families are often faced with difficult choices and abusers often look for situations where the family has a hard time saying no to a high risk situation. We know of a church where a member asked our family friends to allow their son to sleep over at his house before an event in which he and some boys from the church were participating. Our friends did not feel right about the situation and said no. However, in a similar situation, the same member asked another family who was in need of a ride for their son, and so the parents agreed to let their son spend the night. That boy was abused by this same man. Thankfully, the police were contacted and the man was arrested.

#### **Silencing Victims**

Almost all pedophiles manipulate their victims in an attempt to prevent them from talking about the abuse. Some abusers twist theology to convince children the abuse is sanctioned by God, telling lies such as: “This is God’s will for your life. This is part of his plan.” Abusers also silence by lying and convincing children that they are responsible for the abuse: “This is all your fault... You have sinned... God and your parents won’t love you anymore if you tell.” Abusers confuse and terrorize with lies: “You are worthless. God could never love someone like you, but I do. You need me.” Some abusers threaten to harm the child or a family member if they tell. Other pedophiles capitalize on children’s naïvete, telling the child that the abuse is a game and their special secret. Children almost always assume the adults are right, especially in the church, and abusers use this reality to silence their victims and escape detection.<sup>18</sup> Whenever adults tell children, “Don’t tell... it’s our secret,” this is a red flag for abuse. It is also an effective tool abusers use to keep victims from reporting.

For decades, adults have put the burden on children to come forward if they are being abused. Because abusers spin a web of manipulation and lies around a child in order to silence them, this strategy for protection has failed. Children cannot protect themselves without help and rarely tell about abuse without another adult’s help. Sadly, in the cases when children come forward, adults often do not believe them because abusers spin lies around unsuspecting adults as well. As terrible as this sounds, it is the hard truth. In her book *Predators*, Anna Salter reports that in hundreds of interviews with pedophiles, each one said that before they were caught, multiple children came forward but nothing was done. Salter also reported this chilling statement from a pedophile pastor about the credulity of church members:

If children can be silenced and the average person is easy to fool, many offenders report that religious people are even easier to fool than most people. One molester, who was himself a minister, said: “I consider church people easy to fool...they have a trust that comes from being Christians.... They tend to be better folks all around. And they seem to want to believe the good that exists in all people.... I think they want to believe in people.

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18 All parents and churches need to think carefully about whether they are intentionally or unintentionally teaching children that adults or authority figures are never wrong. Not only is this a gross distortion of the truth and a Christian theology of sin, it is a recipe for the abuse of power.

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And because of that, you can easily convince, with or without convincing words.”<sup>19</sup>

Of course we want to believe the best about people, but manipulative abusers know this and take advantage.

When a compassionate adult believes a child’s story about abuse and takes action to stop the abuse, frequently, other adults in the organization attack that adult and the child. For example, many years ago when I (Beth) worked at a Christian summer camp, the police came and arrested a fellow camp counselor. The counselor was accused of making the kids in his cabin play camp games naked. One of the campers courageously told his father when he returned home. The camper’s father wisely called the police. How did my fellow Christian camp counselors respond? They responded by defending the accused counselor, saying things like, “They were just having fun... he would have never done anything *really* inappropriate... this was just boys being boys.” Moreover, many at the camp attacked the father, saying things like, “He overreacted... he must be paranoid... what a jerk to call the police without getting the full story.” These responses minimized a young child’s abusive experiences and attacked the victim and his father.

These uninformed and uncompassionate responses re-traumatize and continue to silence the victim; however, these responses are also typical. Boz Tchividjian, a former prosecutor of child sexual abuse, reports a disturbing trend: “At a recent conference, prosecutors were asked about their observations regarding the supportive role pastors play in child sexual abuse cases. More than two-thirds indicated that they had observed pastors in a supportive role only for the accused perpetrator, not the alleged victim. Such a devastating rebuke is communicated to a child when a church leader so openly supports the one who has been the source of so much deep pain.”<sup>20</sup> While I disagreed with my fellow camp counselors, to my regret I failed to speak up, correct them and show support for the victim. When ministry leaders publicly support victims, they break the silence that abusers hold over their victims. Strong leadership also signals to others in the local church how to respond to victims with compassion and justice.

### **A Biblical Case Study**

All of these key dynamics of abuse can be seen in II Samuel 13 where Amnon rapes his sister Tamar. Amnon is not a stranger but a member of the family and a well-known figure in the community. Amnon is a well-respected and influential prince, the son of King David. But Amnon sexually desires his half-sister Tamar, so he manipulates David and lures Tamar into a isolated situation where she is vulnerable. Amnon deceives David and pretends to be sick. He requests that Tamar wait on him, alone in his room. In this vulnerable and isolated situation, Amnon rapes Tamar, even as she refuses him. Amnon then seems to blame Tamar for his rape, becoming extremely angry with her. Absalom, their brother, hates Amnon for his heinous actions, but even in his anger, Absalom minimizes Tamar’s trauma and silences her, telling her to “hold your peace, my sister” (II Samuel 13:20). David learned about Amnon’s violation of Tamar, but he did not punish his son or require him to make restitution to Tamar. King David did nothing. Eventually, Absalom’s

<sup>19</sup> Salter, 14, 28-29.

<sup>20</sup> Tchividjian, Basyle, *Protecting Children from Abuse in the Church: Steps to Prevent and Respond* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2013), 15.

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bitterness over Amnon and David's inaction boiled over in an attempt to take the throne of David. How did an abuser's manipulation, a leader's inaction and a sympathetic brother's misguided reaction affect the victim? Amnon's abuse was terribly dehumanizing and Tamar received the message loud and clear that she is disposable. David and Absalom's inaction only reinforced her sense of worthlessness. Tamar, the text says, never recovered from this trauma, but "lived, a desolate woman" (II Samuel 13:20).

#### **Creating a Safe Environment Is Everyone's Responsibility**

The antidote to child sexual abuse is faithful adults working together to create a safe environment for children. An unsafe environment in a church is a sin of omission because if we are not actively working to protect children we are part of the problem. Sexual abuse requires two types of people to be present. First, child sexual abuse requires people who harm children. However, abusers cannot abuse without help. The second type of person that child sexual abuse requires are people who passively allow the abuse. The passivity may come from ignorance about how child abuse happens. If we operate under the assumption that abuse prevention is intuitive, we are wrong. We need help and guidance as we protect children and respond to abuse or we will miss key components and signs. The passivity may also arise from denial that such heinous acts could occur under our watch. When we suppress clues and red flags, when we do not act because we think it could not happen to anyone we love, and when we don't insist that other adults protect children, we help abusers. The passivity may also arise because we devalue children. Confronting abuse costs time, money, comfort, and reputations. Sadly, adults often put other things above a child's safety.

However, when adults are informed on child sexual abuse and work together, they create a community that protects children. Imagine a church where the protection of children was held as the highest of virtues. Imagine a church where everyone used their power to protect children, where everyone insisted on protective boundaries for children, and where members were not easily fooled by the manipulations of abusers. All of us would love to grow up in such a church!

#### **A Summary of Key Principles**

- No one can tell an abuser by looking at them.
- Abusers are often religious.
- Abusers groom their victims and any adults who might protect them.
- Abusers then use the trust they have earned to gain access to their victims.
- The abuse entails silencing their victim.
- Abuse results from the actions of abusers, but also the choices other adults make.
- When victims come forward, they are often attacked, as are adults who believe them.
- Abuse's effects are devastating.
- Creating a safe environment for children is everyone's responsibility.

## IV. Responding Faithfully in the Local Church

### A Case Study: What Would You Do?

*The following case study has no connection to any particular situation or actual persons. It is intended to reflect the general realities common to child sexual abuse in the church.*

It is Sunday night at Christ Community Church and the evening's activities are winding down. Jill heads down a dim and deserted corridor of the children's wing. She is a young mom and her daughter left her Sunday school craft behind that morning. Jill knows there will be no peace until it is returned to its rightful owner. She is thankful her daughter loves their church. They have been members for about five years.

As Jill nears her daughter's classroom, she is just hoping to find the lost treasure quickly so she can head home. She opens the door and stops. To her surprise there are two people in the room right beside each other. Jill knows both Mark and Sarah. Mark has been an assistant pastor at the church since before Jill came. He is married and has a son the same age as Jill's daughter. He is a personable leader. He is gifted and well-loved by the congregation. Sarah is twelve. She is a regular in youth group. She seems like a happy girl for the most part, but has been a bit more sullen at times since her parents divorced about a year ago.

They are next to each other, but she didn't see any contact between them. No one is undressed. Mark smiles and greets Jill. He says that Sarah was just helping him sort through some old supplies and then remarks that they need to make a play date soon for the kids. Mark acts as if nothing in the world is amiss. Sarah has glued her eyes to the floor and her face is flushed. Jill asks if she is okay. Sarah continues to stare at the floor and nods curtly. Jill's gut tells her that Sarah is not okay and that something about this is off.

What should she do? Put yourself in Jill's shoes. What would you do?

What *we* would do today in this situation is very different than what we would have done just a few years ago because of new knowledge and training. Before we work through this scenario, let's talk about faithfully preventing child sexual abuse in the local church.

### Courageous Leadership Makes the Difference

Church leaders must understand the scriptures but also the times in which they minister. Holding both biblical truth and context together is the heart of biblical leadership. An example of this biblical leadership is the ministry of Ezra and the problem of intermarriage with unbelievers. As a ministry leader, Ezra not only knew the teaching of Scripture, but saw the current challenge in his context. His response was courageous leadership to bring this to the attention of the people, re-ground them in the truths of the scriptures, and lead them in repentance. Ezra saw that where God stood on this issue was clear in the Torah, but there was widespread compromise that called for special intervention. In response, God used Ezra and his ministry of truth in that context to make a powerful impact on a systemic sin in that time.

Biblical leadership in our time demands that we respond to the reality of child sexual abuse. Although very few dispute that child sexual abuse is an issue today, this is very



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different from a mindset that accepts that it could occur in our particular congregation. Some in our congregations will resist the need to play their parts for various reasons. Some simply will not accept the reality of abuse. Some will insist that they need no instruction. And of course some churches have pedophiles who will resist child protection measures. Strong leadership paves the way for a safe environment by opening communication and building consensus around the biblical truths we have studied and the reality of abuse in our time. Leading a church culture where child sexual abuse is talked about and addressed instead of ignored is one of the best ways to protect children. A well-trained congregation is equipped and committed to make the small, daily decisions needed to protect children as well as the courageous decision to report if abuse occurs.

Church leadership must commit to leading in the area of child protection if the congregation is to follow. Church leaders must help everyone understand their role in creating a safe environment for children in the local church. At an infant's baptism in our denomination, the congregation usually vows to "undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child."<sup>21</sup> Child sexual abuse is the antithesis of Christian nurture and undermines every truth the gospel teaches our children. Working together to create a safe environment in our local church for the discipleship of covenant children is a critical responsibility we share in the body of Christ. This is a tangible recognition that we are one body, each dependent on the other for the edification of the whole (I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:1-16). When everyone grabs hold of the biblical what, why and how, we can pull together and make progress.

### **A Word to Pastors and Elders: Preaching and Teaching about Child Protection**

Pastors and teachers have a unique opportunity to refute the lies of abuse, assure victims that the abuse is not their fault, and affirm God's love for them. If we do not speak about abuse with compassion for victims, it is doubtful that others will be comfortable coming to us with their pain.

Our professor at Covenant Theological Seminary, Jerram Barrs, has said: "I've had pastors say, 'I've been a pastor for twenty years and I've never come across a case of child abuse or wife abuse.' And I say, 'have you talked about it in a way that would encourage anybody to come to you and address these issues?' And I would simply say that if you present yourself to people as someone who understands that such things happen and speaks about them in a way that is careful, sensitive, and gracious, people are going to come and talk to you."<sup>22</sup>

In our experience, this holds true. Whether you know who they are or not, you also know victims of child sexual abuse. When pastors and other church leaders speak openly and address this issue compassionately, it sends the message that talking about abuse is acceptable and breaks what is often a cycle of suffering in silence. It signals to survivors that the leaders are safe people with whom they can entrust their story. When pastors and other church leaders speak about child sexual abuse, they also send a strong message to anyone in their congregation who might be abusing a child. Pastors can publicly con-

<sup>21</sup> *The Book of Church Order* of the PCA, 56-5.

<sup>22</sup> Jerram Barrs, Children's Literature Course, Spring 2009, Lecture 9, accessed at [www.covenantseminary.edu](http://www.covenantseminary.edu).

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demn abusive actions and call anyone to repent and turn themselves into the authorities.

How do we start speaking about these matters? To start, church leaders are charged with teaching and following the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). The Bible speaks against the evils and frequency of sexual exploitation of the vulnerable. For example, Leviticus 18:6–17, Ephesians 4:17–20, and Ephesians 5:3–14 explicitly teach against sexual abuse. Furthermore, Genesis 19:1–13, Judges 19 and II Samuel 13 recount stories of sexual violence and exploitation. Within these stories, all the dynamics we have seen are at play: vulnerability and the abuse of power, fear and devastation, silence and shame. At the very least, pastors should handle these texts competently as they encounter them when they preach and teach through biblical books. If the Bible speaks about these issues then we must have the courage to speak too.

Other key biblical truths that speak to the dynamics of abuse also need to be taught. So many victims in our churches are waiting to hear God speak words of grace and compassion into their pain and confusion. I (Mike) have had the privilege of knowing a youth, I'll call Luke, who is a survivor of child sexual abuse. Luke struggles with how to understand what happened to him, especially the distinction between sinning and being sinned against. From his experience in church, the only category of sin he has is his own sin. He knows what happened to him was sin, so he struggles to see the abuse as anything else but his sin too. Victims need to hear that the Bible clearly distinguishes between sinning and being sinned against. So many young people just have the one category of sin. They feel that since they were involved in this sin the fault and shame is theirs. But child sexual abuse is not the fault of the abused. This is a lie from the abuser and ultimately from the father of lies (John 8:44). God takes the side of the abused. God hates the sin of abuse and holds the abuser responsible (Psalm 10).

Another common struggle Luke has is understanding God's sovereignty and evil. If God is good and all-powerful, how could he allow this abuse to happen to me? Hearing a pastor admit this is a difficult question has been helpful for Luke. Above all, ministry leaders need to refrain from platitudes and preach the gospel with compassion. We don't know why God permits abuse, but we do know Jesus came down to join us in this world filled with abuse. All victims need to hear that Jesus was abused. He was stripped naked and shamed. He was belittled and tortured. Jesus did this to destroy the works of the devil and wipe away every tear from our eyes (I John 3:8; Revelation 21:4).

### **Training is Essential**

Preaching against child sexual abuse is a wonderful start to raising a congregation's awareness about child protection, and church leaders can strengthen these efforts by offering training in child protection. Why is training essential to sound child protection in the local church? Learning about this horrific reality can be a difficult and emotionally draining process. Good training offers clear facts and research about child sexual abuse with the reinforcement and encouragement needed to study the problem together. (See the Resources section at the end of this packet for training you can use in your local context.)

Working with children is not a right, but a privilege and responsibility because children are so valuable in the sight of God. When we embrace this truth as a church, we will want to match actions with our belief by offering the best possible training to protect

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God's precious little ones.

When talking about training, we often hear the comment, "Everyone in the church already knows child sexual abuse is wrong! So why all the fuss?" This attitude conflates two different issues and it is key we make a distinction. While everyone may say they know child sexual abuse is wrong, this is miles away from having everyone in the church properly trained in prevention and response. In college, I (Mike) interned in a large youth group. There was one particular youth who I thought needed some particular attention. I asked his parents if I could take him camping. Thankfully, his parents said they were not comfortable with him going alone with me. I had no intention of harming this boy, and even so, his parents were right to say no to the trip because the isolated situation would not have been safe for him. This was the first time I was ever confronted with sound principles for child protection. If you had asked me if I thought child sexual abuse was wrong, of course I would have said yes. By this time I had already volunteered with youth for several years, and I had no training and knew virtually nothing about protecting children.

Another common statement we come across is, "Isn't this just common sense?" In one narrow sense, maybe, because sound child protection principles are a clear application of the biblical truths to the dynamics of abuse. But this assumes everyone is well-versed in these truths. Sadly, very few are, including us until just a few years ago!

We have a friend who facilitates a wonderful and inexpensive child abuse prevention training. He has trained hundreds of people in dozens of organizations including churches, schools, and other youth serving organizations. In his years of experience, there is one group that is consistently less open to learning about this training: churches. Sadly, many in the church are more committed to being right than getting things right. This brings us back to the key of humility. We as the church must be open to the uncomfortable truth that we might not know as much as we think we know about the abuse of power, how abusers operate, how they silence victims, how high risk churches are, and how to faithfully eliminate risk.

We both played basketball as kids. One of the first things we had to learn was how to dribble and make a layup with our off hand. Learning something new with your off hand is awkward. The only way to become proficient is with proper coaching and determined practice. The same holds true for child protection. It will be awkward for many churches to learn new practices. Yet with the help of good training resources and practice, child protection will gradually become more natural and our children will be better protected. Churches ought to find a good training solution and stick with it. Require a formal training class for all ministry staff and volunteers before they work with any child from the nursery up to youth. Open up and encourage training for everyone in the church. We all have a stake in the protection of children.

### **The Need to Report**

God has ordained civil authorities to be his servant. As God's servant, he gives civil authorities the power of the sword to punish those who do evil. God calls us to submit to these authorities as they carry out their God-ordained role to punish evil (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-14). A key aspect of our submission to the God-ordained civil authorities is to report child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse is not only a sin, but a serious crime, a crime

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God has tasked the civil authorities with punishing for the protection of society. Child sexual abuse is a felony in all fifty states.

Furthermore, most states have mandated reporting laws, making it a crime to know about child sexual abuse and delay or fail to report. In our states, we are both mandated reporters. Having seen the devastating toll of child sexual abuse, asking us whether we report child abuse is like asking whether we will buckle our children in their carseats. Of course we will. Not only is it the law, it is a law that protects children. There should be no question. Reporting child sexual abuse helps keep children safe.

As we have seen, the love of Christ for the vulnerable gives us a moral obligation that goes deeper than any legal requirement. Whether your state requires you to report or not, consider this question: if a child were kidnapped in your congregation, and you knew information that could bring the kidnapper to justice and deliver the child, would you go to the police? Yes, you would. Child sexual abuse is no less threatening to a child's welfare than kidnapping. I (Mike) know a faithful pastor in my denomination who knew exactly what to do when a case of abuse came to light. The abuser confessed and the pastor told him, "Get in the car right now, I am driving you to the police station and you are going to tell them exactly what you told me." This is a shepherd who knows how to protect his sheep.

When churches make the mistake of handling cases of abuse only within the church, they miss the seriousness of this situation. The word abuse can be easy to dismiss. To reiterate, child sexual abuse involves a child being used for sexual foreplay and/or sex by an adult or older child. When this happens, we must act. This is a destructive sin and a crime, as serious as kidnapping and murder. Churches must decide where they stand and say, "We are a church who does not tolerate child sexual abuse. We report it."

### **When Do We Report?<sup>23</sup>**

There are three main situations where abuse needs to be reported:

1. *Witness*—You witness or discover an act of abuse. In this situation you must demonstrate courage. You must intervene and move the child to a safe place and call the authorities immediately. Then follow the proper actions of your church's child protection procedures, such as informing your senior pastor. The pastor can then inform the victim's family and ensure the perpetrator has no further access to children at the church and can initiate appropriate pastoral care for all parties.
2. *Disclosure*—A child tells you of abuse they experienced. In this situation you need to remain calm. Keep the child talking with open-ended questions rather than leading questions (for example, "What happened next? Can you tell me more?"), as long as the child is comfortable. When the child is ready to stop talking, tell the child you believe them, it is not their fault, and you are going to help them. After the initial disclosure, do not try to conduct a lengthy interview, but as soon as is practical, while being sensitive to the child, call the authorities. Then follow the next steps from your church's child protection procedures. When there is a disclosure of abuse, no one, not even the parents

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23 Many of our ideas in this section are indebted to the excellent abuse prevention training *Stewards of Children* produced by *Darkness to Light* ([www.D2L.org](http://www.D2L.org)).

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or the pastor ought to conduct another interview of the child or conduct an internal investigation. The authorities or child advocacy center will have someone who is trained to conduct a child forensic interview. The more interviews the child has, the harder it is on the child and on those tasked with investigating and potentially prosecuting the crime. It is the role of the civil authorities to conduct the criminal investigation (Romans 13:1-7). It is not the place of the church to conduct a criminal investigation, and the church does not have the training to do so.<sup>24</sup>

3. *Reasonable Cause*—You have reasonable cause that child abuse has occurred. Sometimes there are no signs of child sexual abuse, but common signs include:

- A. Bleeding, bruising, pain or other signs of *trauma* around the genitalia (please note when changing a diaper this is very different from a diaper rash)
- B. Sexually transmitted disease in a child
- C. Sexual language and behavior that are not age-appropriate (including promiscuous behavior)
- D. Emotional and behavioral signs such as withdrawal, fear, depression, and unexplained anger
- E. Unexplained swings in behavior and mood
- F. Repeated boundary violations by a volunteer (e.g. you find them isolated with a child or pushing the limits of appropriate touch)
- G. Difficulty sitting or walking without pain
- H. Verbal disclosures that are suspicious but stop short of a disclosure of abuse. A child might say in reference to a particular person:
  - “I don’t like \_\_\_\_\_.”
  - “\_\_\_\_\_ does things to me in Sunday School.”
  - “\_\_\_\_\_ fooled around with me.”
  - “\_\_\_\_\_ asked me to come into the bathroom with him.”
  - “\_\_\_\_\_ makes me uncomfortable.”

Offenders are rarely caught in the act of abusing a child, but they’re often seen breaking the rules and crossing boundaries. If there is a reasonable cause to believe there has been child sexual abuse, a report should be made immediately to the civil authorities. However, having a suspicion that something is not right does not automatically mean a report must be made. At the very least some responsible action should be taken. Such actions might include:

- Asking a child why a certain person makes them uncomfortable or why they are so upset.
- Asking a parent about how a child was bruised or if they know what might explain a dramatic change in behavior or temperament.
- Keeping a closer eye on a particular adult or older child who is demonstrating suspicious behavior to ensure they are not alone with a child.
- Asking someone why they were in an isolated area with a child and reminding

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24 Tchividjian, Boz. “Christians and the struggle to report child abuse,” available at <http://boz.religionnews.com/2014/02/07/struggle-report/>

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them that this is unsafe and against our code of conduct.

- Reminding another volunteer about appropriate touching boundaries.

After taking these actions, if a pattern of behavior surfaces that goes beyond a concern to a reasonable cause (not necessarily proof) to believe that a child is being abused, many states require this to be reported, and for the sake of the child it is best to make a report to the authorities so they can conduct a proper investigation. Examples of such reasonable cause would include but not be limited to:

- A. You have witnessed a pattern of boundary violations and the person continues in willful violation despite bringing it to their attention.
- B. You have seen the physical signs of abuse such as signs of a rape or a sexually transmitted disease.
- C. A child demonstrates knowledge of explicit sexual behavior beyond an age-appropriate level.
- D. A child says something suspicious and upon asking open-ended questions, there is reason to believe there has been abuse.

### Sticking Points on Reporting

*What about false accusations?*

The incidence of false accusations is surprisingly low. At the current time, the much more disturbing problem is how few acts of abuse are reported. Because of the shame involved, so many children do not speak of the abuse until they are adults, if ever. Studies generally put false accusations between 1 and 2.5 percent.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, research has shown that only about 5 percent of child sexual abuse is reported.<sup>26</sup> Both false accusations and unreported child sexual abuse are terrible. In our time, by far the most common of these problems are cases of unreported child sexual abuse. The solution to reducing false reports is not to report less. Not reporting when we have reason to believe child sexual abuse has occurred exposes vulnerable children and fuels a greater problem.

*Don't we have to follow Matthew 18?*

In the context, Matthew 18 is about how to handle a personal offense against you: "If your brother sins *against you*, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone" (Matthew 18:15, emphasis added). Serious crimes against vulnerable children do not fit into this box. As we have seen, Romans 13 and I Peter 2 are more applicable to the molestation and rape of children because they speak of the God-given role of the civil authorities to punish evil that is detrimental to the public good. It would be unbiblical and truly cruel to force a child to go and confront their abuser, even if there were another adult present. Such traumatic sins require a different approach to be biblical.

*Doesn't clergy-member privilege protect pastors from reporting?*

You need to know the laws in your state. However, most Protestant denominations do not have an official church doctrine of confidentiality in confession like the Ro-

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25 Jones, D. P. H., and J. M. McGraw, "Reliable and Fictitious Accounts of Sexual Abuse to Children." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2, 27-45, 1987. Oates, R. K., D.P. Jones, D. Denson, A. Sirotnak, N. Gary, and R.D. Krugman, "Erroneous Concerns about Child Sexual Abuse." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 24:149-57, 2000.

26 Salter, 12.

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man Catholic Church. We do not know of any state whose laws offer protection for this type of communication without an official church doctrine of confidentiality. Moreover, even where this is protected, the only protection it offers is that the clergy-member communication cannot be used in a court of law as evidence against the accused. As an urgent matter of safety for the children of the community, we would hope any priest who was protected by a doctrine of confidentiality in confession would still report such a dangerous person to the God-ordained civil authorities. Otherwise, he is leaving his own flock and the children of the community exposed.

*Why shouldn't the church do its own investigation before calling authorities in order to be sure there has been abuse?*

The church should not investigate before they report when there is reasonable cause to believe child sexual abuse has occurred. This is usually motivated out of a reluctance to report without having certain proof, but this actually interferes with and delays a forensic investigation by civil authorities, those trained and called by God to do so. This delay can thwart the cause of justice. For example, a delay for an internal investigation can lead to a loss of physical evidence (which must be collected by a professional in a timely fashion) and it can alert the alleged offender so he destroys evidence, takes other abusive actions, or flees to avoid arrest. Finally, churches who conduct their own investigation and decide not to report are often breaking the law by violating mandated reporting laws. After a report has been made, churches may then conduct an investigation for their own benefit as long as it does not interfere with the civil authorities. Churches will want to investigate to see if their child protection measures broke down so they can update their plan accordingly. Churches will also want to conduct an investigation if the authorities do not file charges. If they do not file charges this does not mean the person is necessarily innocent or should be working with children.

*Won't all of these measures create an atmosphere of suspicion and fear?*

Some might worry that these measures are too drastic, especially in smaller churches where everyone is known. Think of it this way: the common procedures for accountability around the church finances do not *create* suspicion and fear, but when carried out well they actually *reduce* them. It is the same with child protection. People of integrity have no problems when others insist on accountability. Our children who are made in God's image are worth holding one another accountable. And accountability also protects adults as well as children. This is needed in larger churches because everyone is not well-known by everyone else. But it is just as important in small churches. Because everyone is known, the price of holding others you know so well accountable is higher if there is any resistance to child protective measures.

*Does having a policy to report open us up to increased legal liability?*

The first thing to say is our top priority has to be protecting children. Thankfully, protecting children and reducing legal liability are not at odds, but go hand in hand. When we consider liability, churches who are not pro-actively protecting children are vulnerable *now* whether they realize it or not. Churches are already bound legally

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with or without a policy or training because child sexual abuse is a felony in all 50 states and all states have their own mandated reporting laws. A well-executed policy reduces liability by reducing the risk of abuse and it gives notice to perpetrators that we are aware and vigilant in the care of our children. Perpetrators will often avoid churches that are on-guard against abuse.

### **The Temptation to Keep Silent**

As we have seen, children often keep silent about the abuse they suffer because of the shame involved, as well as the manipulation and threats of the abuser. Many victims only speak when they become adults, if ever. At the same time, many heartbreaking testimonies reveal that the response of the church when children do come forward is often one of disbelief and cover up.<sup>27</sup> In these situations, churches are often tempted to handle abuse within the church only.

Many think reporting prevents church discipline, but it does no such thing. Rather, as we have seen, refusing to report usurps the God-ordained role of the civil authorities. Child sexual abuse is a grievous sin and crime, one that cannot be healed by simply saying, “I’m sorry and I promise never to do it again.” Perpetrators must face the legal consequences of their actions and make restitution whenever possible, both fully biblical concepts.

As a child, Jennifer Bicha was abused by her older brother. At different times when she was growing up, her father, mother, Christian school teacher, and pastor all learned about the abuse. None of them intervened to stop it. None of them reported it. The abuse continued and her brother also abused her younger sister. When she finally reported the abuse, all by herself as a young adult, a prosecutor told her: “Every adult in your life has failed you.”<sup>28</sup>

When churches keep silent, they enable further abuse, either in the same church or in another church. Handling abuse “in house” shows blatant disregard for children by exposing them to the continued presence of a dangerous person. Offenders usually have many victims, so delay and silence often lead to further abuse.

As we are writing, the trial of a prominent child abuse case has just concluded with the conviction of a predator of multiple boys. The abuse happened years ago when the offender was a lay leader in the church. A member of the pastoral staff testified under oath that he knew of the abuse and of his obligation to report it over 20 years ago. He never called the authorities.<sup>29</sup> The offender moved on and pastored in at least one other church. We do not know how many other victims this man might have had because of this failure to report, but there is no excuse for this careless exposing of children to danger.

Churches often fear liability or worry about their reputation and future ministry if they report abuse. However, most victims simply want churches to own up to their failure and accept responsibility. When a lawsuit occurs, it is usually only after the church has pushed the victim away without compassion and without acknowledging any responsibility. If we are concerned for the reputation of the church, we must remember that believing

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27 For two gut-wrenching stories, see: *This Little Light* by Christa Brown (2009: Foremost Press, Cedarburg, WI, 2009) and “The High Cost of Negligence” by Jamie Dean, *World* magazine (Nov. 2, 2013).

28 Dean, p. 38.

29 See <http://www.wjla.com/articles/2014/05/nathaniel-morales-of-covenant-life-church-convicted-of-sexually-abusing-young-boys-103175.html>



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the gospel means we can own up to our sin because our reputation ultimately rests in the righteousness of Christ alone. Minimizing sin boils down to resisting the gospel, while reporting and owning up to our sin actually furthers the cause of the gospel.

Many churches also worry that reporting will lead to gossip in the church. However, many victims report how their church used this concern about “gossip” to remain silent and refuse to deal with this horrific sin. This is an all too common dynamic in churches, where abusers and their enablers silence victims and others in the church by distorting the biblical teaching on gossip. Gossip is the misuse of information, even true information, to tear another down. Bringing truth into the light for the protection of children and the confrontation of the sinner is a godly use of information, not gossip. Once a report of child sexual abuse has been made, those with knowledge of the situation need to handle the truth with wisdom and discretion.

However, “wisdom and discretion” does not mean silence. Church leaders need to take courageous and faithful action. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Speak out for those who cannot speak. Who in the church today realizes that this is the very least that the Bible requires of us?”<sup>30</sup> If there is not a proper response by church leaders to report or restrict access of the accused to children, it is not gossip to bring the truth to light and advocate for children who might be in danger. Abusers and those who protect them will often oppose attempts to deal with the reality of the situation. In this scenario, it is not gossip for individuals to act with courage for the safety of children, including informing other parents of the danger. Churches should consult experts when navigating these situations to help them respond faithfully. We recommend reaching out to G.R.A.C.E. (see the Recommended Resources section below).

### The Cost of Silence

As we have learned, when a child has been raped or molested in the church, the spiritual consequences are devastating. Many victims leave the church for good, often struggling deeply with feelings of worthlessness because they have been so ill-used. And yet for many, the most damage is done by the inaction of those they go to within the church for help. In her important and heart-breaking book, *This Little Light*, Christa Brown recounts her pastor’s words to her when she courageously disclosed her abuse at the hands of another pastor on staff: “It’ll be better if you don’t tell anyone else.... Just leave it in God’s hands.”<sup>31</sup> This attitude toward the oppression of a child is indefensible from the shepherds who are charged with protecting the sheep (Ezekiel 34:1-10; cf. Job 29:17).

There is no doubt that it takes courage and uncomfortable action to respond faithfully, especially because the abuser is usually someone we know. We must prepare ourselves for the cost. Above all we must remember the exponentially higher cost of silence to present and future children. Judith Herman puts it well: “It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering.”<sup>32</sup>

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30 Metaxas, Eric *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 246.

31 Brown, *This Little Light*, 22-23.

32 Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 7-8.

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Reporting the crime is best for the victim *and the offender*. Reporting enables repentance and reconciliation to begin. Truth is what matters in the sight of God far more than human reputations. Sin is far worse than losing your reputation among men, and the reality is that if someone has molested or raped children then their good reputation is a lie. Reporting also allows us to uncover other potential victims who need care. Silence is a devastating alternative to reporting. A Christian expert on child sexual abuse in the church, Dr. Lynette Frantzen, makes the point:

Silence deprives a victim of the opportunity to move from being a victim of sexual abuse to a survivor and, eventually, to someone who thrives. At the same time, silence perpetuates the destructive cycle of perpetrators and denies them the opportunity for healing. The perpetrator needs to realize that there are consequences. Because of the shame and embarrassment, most sex offenders are unlikely to reach out for help on their own. The perpetrator benefits when sexual abuse is reported. Reporting a perpetrator lets him or her know that sexual abuse is not tolerated, that there are consequences for such behavior, and provides him or her with mandated and specialized help to avoid offending again.<sup>33</sup>

All churches need to adopt a zero-tolerance policy of child sexual abuse and commit to reporting it. Until abuse touches our own lives or those close to us, even the word abuse can be easy to dismiss. Again, child sexual abuse involves a child being used for foreplay and/or sex by an adult. When this happens, we must report. Churches have a real choice when confronting child sexual abuse. We also have a choice when we come to a red light and the intersection is full of cars and pedestrians. The wrong choice in either case will damage lives. When we ignore our legal and moral obligation to report child sexual abuse, inevitably, children pay the price, and the cost is heavy.

### **Ministering to Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse<sup>34</sup>**

The church can play a vital role in the healing of child sexual abuse survivors. When child sexual abuse is perpetrated in a church, by someone who names the name of Jesus, the spiritual damage is devastating. And yet, the only hope for rescue and hope is through the gospel of Jesus that is proclaimed and lived out in the local church. Pastors and counselors must realize the opportunity they have to bring this light of hope into a very dark place. Ministry to survivors begins by preaching the hope of the gospel for sinners *and* for those who are sinned against.

The Bible certainly addresses our sin without flinching. At the same time that the Bible offers good news because of our sin, it offers good news to those who have been trampled on by the wicked and powerful (Luke 4:18). When we speak about the abuse of power and the other dynamics of abuse from the Bible, when we speak about child sexual abuse in a compassionate way, people will see us as a safe person. There are people in your church who have been sexually abused as children, even if you don't know who they are.

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33 Dr. Lynette Frantzen, "Sex offenders in the church: From apathy to action," *Ministry International Journal for Pastors* (September, 2013). Her entire article is available online and is well worth the time.

34 Our ideas in this section have been shaped by the work of Dr. Diane Langberg. See the Recommended Resources section for several of her important works on this topic.

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The church must become a safe place for victims. Healing for survivors often starts with a leader who speaks out with courage and compassion for the victim of abuse.

It is critical that we have a good grasp of the trauma inflicted by child sexual abuse. In the woods near where we grew up, there was a large tree where the trunk turned sharply and ran parallel to the ground for several feet before turning sharply again and continuing up. As a child I (Mike) wondered what had happened to that tree. As I grew up I realized that another tree had fallen on that tree when it was very young. The trauma of that fall had warped the growth of the tree. The tree still grew, but the trauma had distorted its growth.

In the same way, children who are traumatized while they are developing have normal development interrupted and distorted. As ministers, counselors, and fellow-members of the body, we must understand with compassion that the trauma of abuse affects the person physically, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and relationally. It will be helpful to learn about the effect of this trauma as you seek to minister to a survivor. You also might need to help them find a counselor. Look for a Christian counselor who has specific training and experience working with survivors of child sexual abuse. The American Association of Christian Counselors and Together We Heal are good places to start looking.<sup>35</sup>

For victims, the trauma of abuse warps their view of God, self, and relationships. It is important for pastors, counselors, and friends to understand something of these dynamics. These will help us to relate to victims in a compassionate way that does not seek to treat their wounds lightly (Jeremiah 8:11).

- *Warped View of God*—Many victims of abuse struggle mightily in their relationship with God. Victims often see God as either distant, capricious, or cruel. This is understandable given the horror they have experienced. How could God let this happen? While avoiding platitudes, the hope of the gospel is needed, the hope of a God who willingly entered our dark world of pain, and joined us in our suffering to defeat evil forever. Abuse is a work of the devil. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8). We must understand that for some, the very precious truths of God's love have been used in an abusive way. In her book, *This Little Light*, Christa Brown recounts how a friend reached out to her and sought to comfort her by reminding her of God's love and God's will.<sup>36</sup> This was re-traumatizing to her because these were the very words her pastor abuser used to manipulate her. She says imagine if you had always been abused while the abuser played Beethoven. What would happen if you were walking around the mall and heard Beethoven play? You would have a physiological response because the music would take you right back to the experience of your abuse. We must understand that for some the very truths of the gospel can have this type of response. We must be compassionate and wise. This means first listening to each victim and their unique story.
- *Warped View of Self*—Victims have been preyed upon and used as a disposable commodity by their abusers. Therefore they naturally struggle with seeing themselves as disposable, because this is what the abuse taught them as pliable chil-

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35 See [www.aacc.net/resources/find-a-counselor/](http://www.aacc.net/resources/find-a-counselor/) and [www.together-we-heal.org/therapists/](http://www.together-we-heal.org/therapists/).

36 Brown, *This Little Light*, 213-216.

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dren. Victims also struggle with blaming themselves. As children they don't have much else in their limited experience to explain why it would have happened otherwise. And of course many abusers have sowed this lie as well. The result is abuse has deeply ingrained in victims a belief that they are worthless and unlovable. This makes believing the gospel difficult. How could God love them if they are so deeply flawed? Even if they believe Christ died for others it is often difficult for them to accept that Jesus died for them.

- *Warped View of Relationships*—As malleable children, victims learn when they are abused that relationships are for using other people. What is right and wrong in a relationship is all mixed up. They have also learned that deception and relationships go hand in hand. Certainly you can never really trust another person. Why would you? If you can't trust, you must protect yourself from harm by trying to stay in control at all costs. All of this makes relationships difficult. Also, understandably, forgiveness is often very difficult for victims. Just like repentance for the perpetrator, forgiveness for the victim is a long term process. Don't be insensitive by insisting that it is easy or that it must happen immediately. Many victims have been further shamed by having Jesus' words about forgiveness pushed upon them as if granting forgiveness to your abuser is like turning on a light (Matthew 18:21-22). For victims of trauma, forgiveness is not a switch they can just flip. God expects that we would apply biblical teaching on forgiveness with wisdom and sensitivity. Forgiveness is an extremely costly and ongoing action and compassion demands that we empathize with victims of trauma.

### Offenders at Church

Offenders ought not to attend church with any of their former victims. The presence of the one who inflicted such horror on them ends up re-traumatizing the victim. Churches must take great care when there is a confessed or convicted pedophile attending their church. What are some key considerations in this situation? This is a complex situation and the first critical step is to realize you don't have to handle it alone. Get help, seek resources and consultation, and prayerfully consider your course.<sup>37</sup>

While the gospel offers grace to all sinners, at the same time the gospel is never contrary to accountability. The gospel is not cheap grace. We need to apply the full range of teaching from the Bible on repentance and restitution. If you truly care about the person you will insist upon accountability. Furthermore, Scripture teaches that repentance is not primarily words, but a heart change that manifests itself in an ongoing commitment to walking in a path of new obedience. Someone who is truly on the path of repentance will openly seek out accountability and transparency. A truly repentant person will be more afraid of committing another offense against children than what people think of him or what accountability the church requires.

The church officers need to engage in a frank discussion with the offender so they can make an informed decision about the accountability measures that will be in place. You must do your due diligence for the sake of your children. Get his court records so you can

<sup>37</sup> Start by reading "Suffer the Children: Developing Effective Church Policies on Child Maltreatment" by Victor I. Vieth, especially sections 7 and 8. We are indebted to his wisdom in this section.

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see the actual extent of his crimes. Is he honest about it or does he minimize it? Does he own up to all of his sin, or only the charges the state prosecuted? Also, secure a release to allow you to speak with his therapist. If he resists, this is not a safe person to have in your church.

Offenders' willingness or unwillingness to submit to such a discussion and specific accountability measures will be a very telling sign as to whether they are on a path of repentance. This discussion needs to outline clear boundaries and expectations as well as provide for ongoing evaluation. Such measures would certainly include a prohibition from working with children and youth. Church leadership should assign someone to be with the person at all times when he is on church grounds and require that he stay in high visibility areas. For bathroom use, the assigned accountability person should check the bathroom to ensure it is clear of children before the offender enters and then ensure no children enter until the offender comes out. Dr. Frantzen recommends evaluating the following risk factors in an open discussion with church leadership:<sup>38</sup>

1. *Does the offender understand they are a risk?*
2. *Do they have a good support system?*
3. *Do they have an attitude of entitlement toward sex?*
4. *Do they have access to potential victims?*
5. *Are they compliant with supervision and/or treatment?*
6. *Are they hostile and angry?*
7. *Do they use drugs and alcohol?*
8. *Do they continually deny responsibility or blame others?*
9. *Do they ask forgiveness but do not apologize?*

It is also recommended to have an open discussion with the whole church. If the officers decide to keep this information from the congregation, it will probably not remain secret for long with the internet and with sex offender registry lists. When it does come out parents and survivors will likely feel betrayed. Giving the parents and survivors a voice is critical. If the church is uncomfortable and/or the offender is not fully receptive to accountability an option is to have a few mature members from the church go to his or her home for weekly services.

We want to minister the grace of the gospel to all sinners, but at the same time we must always remember what is at stake for our vulnerable children. Thankfully, the two are not exclusive. In fact, one of the most grace-giving things we can do for offenders is hold them accountable to walk with God in the light. If we offer grace without accountability to walk in the light, we are all deceiving ourselves (I John 1:6-8).

### **The Final Apologetic and Child Protection**

What would happen to the church's witness if we made all churches a safe place for children? As we grow in our knowledge and skill in prioritizing and protecting children in the local church, the world will notice. This is simply a way Christ calls us to show his love in a very observable and deliberate way to our younger brothers and sisters in the faith.

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38 Dr. Lynette Frantzen, "Sex offenders in the church: From apathy to action," *Ministry International Journal for Pastors* (September, 2013). This article will be a key resource for any church with an offender in attendance.

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Expounding on Jesus' words in John 13:33–34 and 17:21, Francis Schaeffer called the observable love Jesus commands us to show toward other Christians “The Final Apologetic” to unbelievers. He wrote, “...After we have done our best to communicate to a lost world, still we must never forget that the final apologetic which Jesus gives is the observable love of true Christians...”<sup>39</sup> By prioritizing child protection in our day, local churches have a huge opportunity to demonstrate the observable love of Christ.

Many of the estimated tens of millions of survivors in the U.S. are members in our churches. Taking genuine steps to learn and implement sound child protection measures would be an encouragement to them. At the same time, it will be difficult to speak about the love of Jesus to abuse victims outside the church unless we are demonstrating that love in an observable way by protecting children well in our local church. The testimony of a local church is powerful when our words have integrity by matching our actions. A message about the God of light resonates with more power when the truth of that light is being reflected in the lives of the messengers.

### **Returning to Our Case Study**

Now let's revisit our fictional case study from the opening of this section to show how training and church leadership can make all the difference. Remember the scenario: a young mom named Jill has walked into an isolated classroom at the church and finds her assistant pastor Mark with Sarah, a 12 year-old. They are next to each other, but she didn't see any contact between them. No one is undressed. The pastor acts as if nothing is wrong. Sarah's face is flushed and she looks at the floor. Jill feels in her gut that something is off. What should she do? Let's consider three possible endings with different church approaches to child protection in order to illustrate the necessity and value of strong leadership and training in the local church.

#### *Ending 1*

In the context of the first ending, Jill's church has a child protection plan. The church leaders took the recommendation of their insurance company to have one. They used a template from the insurance company and it resides securely in a file in the church office. Jill has attended the church for several years now but has never even heard that the church has a child protection plan. She has had no training in child protection even though she often serves in the nursery. She has not heard any teaching from the Bible that addresses these matters.

As she surveys the scene in the classroom, Jill has a gut feeling that something is wrong. Mark speaks up and convincingly assures her that Sarah was just helping him sort through some old supplies. After an awkward moment, Jill asks the Sarah if she is okay. She keeps her eyes on the floor but nods. Jill says goodbye and heads back down the hallway.

Walking away, Jill is still bothered about the situation. Should she do anything else? What can she do? A dozen thoughts flash through her mind. Mark is a wonderful man, everyone loves him. He is so gifted! And he is a pastor! A pastor would never harm a child. Who would she speak to anyway? Would anyone believe her? Would that be gossip? Would they scold her? What would she even say? She did not actually see anything. There was no

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39 Schaeffer, Francis. *The Mark of the Christian, The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer (Vol. 4)* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1985), 190.

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contact, no one was undressed.

Jill decides there is nothing she can do. She says nothing to anyone. If this were an abusive situation, Jill has not been given the training and leadership she needs to take the right actions to keep Sarah safe.

##### *Ending 2*

Now imagine the same church with a different leadership approach to child protection. Jill's church has a child protection plan. About 10 years ago, an elder from the church attended a seminar on child sexual abuse prevention. He brought the issue to the pastor and the other elders. They agreed they needed to learn more about the issue and do more to protect children. A committee went through training and developed a good plan, which includes a child protection policy, child protection procedures, and a code of conduct specific to their church. The pastor taught the congregation why it was so valuable and how they all had a role to play.

Jill is very familiar with the child protection plan and her role in protecting children at church. She knows that the code of conduct prohibits adults being alone with a child because when she volunteered to work in the nursery on Sunday mornings, she agreed to follow and help others abide by the code of conduct before she served. She has been through a two-hour training session in child protection twice over the last five years. She has heard her pastor talk about the reality of abuse from the pulpit. She knows that Jesus hears the prayer of the vulnerable and that faithful adults can prevent abuse.

In the isolated classroom, Jill has a gut feeling that something is wrong. The assistant pastor smiles and assures her that they were just sorting through some old supplies together. Jill asks Sarah if she is okay. Sarah keeps looking at the floor but nods. Jill pauses. It is not normally in her nature to correct a pastor. Her heart is pounding and she feels like walking away. But she is prepared for this moment. She knows what to do and she is confident it is right for Sarah. She knows the other church leaders will support her, even though this is the assistant pastor.

Jill takes a deep breath and then reminds Mark that the church's code of conduct forbids any one adult, one child situations and that Sarah needs to come with her. Mark hesitates for a moment but smiles and says of course, he just forgot.

Jill takes Sarah and leads her down the hallway to an open observable area where they can still have a private conversation. Jill sympathetically tells Sarah that she seems upset, and that it is okay to tell her if something is wrong, because she is here to help her. Sarah finds the courage to say that Mark has singled her out on other occasions. He has told her God has a special plan for them. He said God told him that they are going to get married someday. Mark has touched her inappropriately and she feels guilty about it because Mark is married already. She enjoys the attention in one sense and hates it in another. She knows this is sin and she has felt too guilty and ashamed to tell anyone. She is so confused.

Jill listens intently and asks only open-ended questions. Jill assures Sarah that she believes her and that this is not her fault. Jill assures Sarah that she is going to do everything she can to help her. Then Jill takes Sarah to the church office, and Jill calls the local child advocacy center and makes a report of child sexual abuse. She tells the senior pastor and Sarah's family. The elders act immediately to ensure Mark has no further access to

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children and they initiate compassionate pastoral care for Sarah. In the end, Mark is fired and he spends time in jail. He never pastors at that church again. Hopefully, if he tried to pastor again, churches doing their due diligence would check references and discover that Mark does not need to be a pastor.

Despite the horror Sarah has endured, the church leadership has put in place a system that minimized the damage. And the reality is that someone like Mark is less likely to be at a church like this. Jill acted courageously despite an incredibly intimidating situation. Mark was in a position of great power. As an adult, Mark had physical power over Sarah, and as a trained pastor, he had spiritual power, emotional power, verbal power, and theological power. All that power without accountability is a recipe for disaster. And yet, because the church leadership used their power redemptively, to equip their congregation to protect the vulnerable, Sarah was delivered out of an abusive situation and perhaps many others were spared.

### *Ending 3*

Now let's consider a third ending. Here, imagine the church has the same solid approach to child protection as in Ending 2. Jill and the church are well-trained in child protection. In the isolated classroom, Jill has a gut feeling that something is wrong. The assistant pastor smiles and assures her that they were just sorting through some old supplies together. Jill asks Sarah if she is okay. Sarah keeps looking at the floor but nods. What should she do? Jill pauses. Again, it is not her habit to correct a pastor. Her heart is pounding and she feels like walking away. But she knows what to do and she is confident it is right for Sarah. She knows the other church leaders will support her, even though this is the assistant pastor.

Jill takes a deep breath and then reminds Mark that the church's code of conduct forbids any one adult, one child situations and that Sarah needs to come with her. She goes to an open, observable area and tells Sarah that she doesn't seem okay and that she can tell her if something is bothering her. Sarah hesitates, but then reveals that one of her friends at school said something mean about Sarah behind her back. It has been eating her up inside for the last few days and she doesn't know what to do. Sarah was talking to Mark about the situation in the classroom. Jill gives her a few wise words of encouragement and prays with her.

When Sarah heads off to speak with some of her friends, Jill does not know whether Mark was acting with integrity or not. She goes to speak with the senior pastor about this dangerous boundary violation by Mark. When she gets there, Mark is already there talking with the senior pastor. Mark is owning up to his misjudgment to the senior pastor and he apologizes on the spot to Jill and thanks her for speaking up. He realizes this was an inappropriate and dangerous situation for him to be alone with a vulnerable child. The senior pastor reminds Mark that the code of conduct is there because children are so vulnerable and everyone must avoid situations where we put children at risk. The senior pastor thanks Jill for taking the appropriate and courageous action to intervene. The incident is documented and kept with church records.

Over the next few months, Mark does not violate that boundary again. In this scenario, Mark was not abusing or preparing to abuse Sarah. However, Jill did not know that. Jill still did the right thing. It is often the case that we will not learn the actual truth of the



situation in the moment, if ever. Yet day by day we must make dozens of small decisions with the best interests of children in mind, even though we don't know the outcome of every situation. We must resolve to faithfully guard safe and agreed-upon boundaries for the love of children.

## **V. Writing Your Child Protection Plan**

### **Getting Started**

Every church ought to implement a child protection plan based on the biblical principles outlined above, as well as taking into account the realities of how abuse works. For reasons we will elaborate upon below, it is recommended that churches develop a child protection plan that includes three main documents:

1. Child Protection Policy
2. Child Protection Procedures
3. Code of Conduct

Wise child protection plans, when implemented well, can dramatically reduce the risk of abuse in our churches. Consistent implementation of child protection plans takes leadership and resolve. Effective plans are informed by up-to-date child protective standards, endorsed publicly by church leaders, taught to staff, volunteers and parents, and diligently enforced by everyone. Each local church must work through the particularities of its congregation and apply child protection principles to its context.

If your local church does not currently have a child protection plan, writing your own may seem overwhelming. Be encouraged! You are not alone. In this section we will walk through some important principles to keep in mind and guide you through the process. We have also provided some sample documents in the next section so you do not have to start from scratch.

Please be aware that there is a danger in simply taking a document and putting your name on it. We want to avoid that as much as possible while still helping you have an excellent plan. Our counsel to you is if you take the sample documents below as your starting point, do not skip the process outlined here of building consensus with church officers, ministry staff, and volunteers. This process will hopefully avoid an all-too-common situation where a church has a child protection plan but no one knows it well or supports it.

If you already have a plan, there is still much to do, because unless we are intentional with our actions, plans easily become reduced to words on paper. For you, this section and the samples will help you evaluate your plan and potentially strengthen it.

### **The Process—Building Consensus**

The goal of this process is not just to have a good child protection plan, but to build consensus in the church around a good plan so everyone plays their part in child protection. The process outlined here is given with that end goal in mind. This is critical, because unless your plan is well implemented, it will have limited impact for the safety of children.

#### ***1. Form a Committee***

Whatever your church's form of government, it is important that this committee be sanctioned by the leadership of the church. The leadership ought to outline some specifics of the committee's tasks, including its scope, whether to formulate an initial plan or evaluate an existing plan. The committee ought to comprise a diversity of people who are humble

## V. Writing Your Child Protection Plan

and willing to learn about child protection. It would of course to be wise to include on the committee any who have expertise on child protection issues.

### 2. Seek Wisdom

Take time to go through a child abuse prevention training together as a committee, either online, or preferably in person. We recommend using *Stewards of Children* by Darkness to Light.<sup>40</sup> This is a two hour training conducted by a trained facilitator. If there are no facilitators in your area, the training is available online. As a minimum requirement, have each person of the committee read the following excellent resources and encourage all church officers and ministry leaders to do the same. These are shorter resources so this is a realistic goal.

- “Sexual Abuse in Christian Organizations” by Dr. Diane Langberg<sup>41</sup>
- “Suffer the Children: Developing Effective Church Policies on Child Maltreatment” by Victor I. Vieth<sup>42</sup>
- *Protecting Children from Abuse in the Church: Steps to Prevent and Respond* by Basyle “Boz” Tchividjian<sup>43</sup>
- “Christians and the struggle to report child abuse” by Basyle “Boz” Tchividjian
- “Sex offenders in the church: From apathy to action” by Lynette Frantzen

You should also assign particular members of the committee to read the other longer recommended resources below so they can relay to the whole committee what they gained (see the Recommended Resources section below). Have at least one or two read each of the following.

- *Predators: Pedophiles, Rapists, & Other Sex Offenders: Who They Are, How They Operate, and How We Can Protect Ourselves and Our Children* by Anna Salter
- *On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church* by Deepak Reju (forthcoming in 2014)
- *This Little Light: Beyond a Baptist Preacher Predator and His Gang* by Christa Brown
- *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault* by Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb

### 3. Agree on the Number of Documents and Structure

Many churches have found it helpful to have multiple documents instead of one all-inclusive document. One complete document is often unwieldy for churches and not everyone needs to understand every part of the document. We recommend a child protection plan with at least three main documents: a policy document, a procedures document, and a code of conduct. See below for why these three separate documents are a good idea.

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40 See [www.D2L.org](http://www.D2L.org).

41 Dr. Langberg is a member of our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and is an international speaker, author, and expert on child sexual abuse. She has decades of experience counseling victims of child sexual abuse in the church as well as counseling pastors who have committed abuse in their church.

42 Victor Vieth is a Christian and serves as the director of both the National Child Protection Training Center and the National Center for the Prosecution of Child Abuse.

43 Boz Tchividjian is a ruling elder in our denomination. He is a law professor at Liberty University School of Law and is a former prosecutor of child sexual abuse cases. He is also the founder of G.R.A.C.E. (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment).

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### **4. Consult Experts**

As you work together it would be wise to get an expert in these matters to review your work and offer suggestions. This will also help sharpen your work and support it with sound arguments as you present it to church leadership and the congregation. We highly recommend consulting with *Adults Protecting Children* or G.R.A.C.E.<sup>44</sup> You should also consult your insurance provider and your attorney, but realize they are not typically trained in child protection. They are focused on reducing liability, which is good as far as it goes, and yet there is so much more to faithfulness to the Lord than reducing liability.

### **5. Present It to the Church Leadership**

Your church leadership needs to review and approve your work. This will enable them to endorse the documents so the whole congregation knows that these documents have authority. If the church leadership does not understand and support the biblical principles that lead us to protect children, then your child protection plan will have limited effectiveness.

### **6. Educate Your Congregation**

The church leadership needs to present the child protection plan to the congregation. Each church context is different, so leadership will need to decide on the best approach. One possibility is to present it over two to three weeks on a Wednesday night, or in a joint Sunday school time. These formats will allow for a presentation of the biblical rationale, the purpose of the different documents, everyone's role in keeping children safe, and the specific boundaries everyone is responsible to follow. This approach also allows for interaction and answering specific questions. This sets the tone that allows for everyone to be more comfortable protecting the agreed-upon boundaries for protecting children.

### **7. Build In Procedures for Ongoing Evaluation**

In this process you will need to put in place some procedures for ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of your plan. There are always things that will come to light that need to be addressed or that are not working well. This will build in a procedure to always be strengthening your plan.

### **8. Live Your Plan!**

Just as important as having a thorough plan built on a sound biblical approach is living it out everyday. Jesus taught that his true family members are those who hear the word of God and do it (Luke 8:21). If we don't live out our plan it is worthless and hypocritical. God intends our faith and practice to work hand in hand. This is a huge goal, one that is met in all of our choices day by day.

## **Develop a Child Protection Plan with Three Main Documents**

A sound approach we recommend is having a child protection plan with three main documents:

1. **Child Protection Policy**—This document lays out your church's basic stance toward child protection. It should summarize the Bible's teaching on protecting children, establish your church's core beliefs and guiding principles, and en-

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44 See [www.adultsprotectingchildren.org](http://www.adultsprotectingchildren.org) and [www.netgrace.org](http://www.netgrace.org).

## V. Writing Your Child Protection Plan

code your fundamental commitments in regard to child protection. This document, if well researched and developed in consultation with experts, will rarely change. The truth of the Bible and your church's commitment to child protection should be steadfast.

2. **Child Protection Procedures**—Your procedures document is more of a working document. It contains specific procedures for preventing and responding to child sexual abuse. This document will change as you continue to learn how to best apply the principles from your policy to your environment.
3. **Code of Conduct**—A code of conduct designates the safe behaviors that every particular employee and volunteer has committed to abide by and uphold. Like your child protection procedures document, your code of conduct is a much more practical fleshing out of your policy document but specific to safe behaviors. Your code of conduct should be a living document, always being improved and updated given the present challenges of your context. A code of conduct should get very specific about certain realities in your context. For example, if you have an isolated stairwell or hallway, ensure these are mentioned specifically as places where it is inappropriate for leaders to loiter with children because they are so isolated. A code of conduct should be posted for all to see in the nursery, as well as ministry areas for children and youth.

Having all of these documents in one can be overwhelming. Separating them allows us to better see the big picture of the plan. We have a policy based on biblical principles, which is our basic stance toward child protection. The other two documents outline the procedures we follow and the conduct expected from everyone in relation to children. All of them should be approved and embraced by church leadership, both initially and as they are updated. It is recommended that all in the church are familiar with these documents, but especially pastors, church officers, ministry leaders, parents, and all those who work with children. These next sections will help you think through the purpose and structure of each document and section. Further below, there are sample documents, but you should finish reading this section before you start work on your own documents. Use these next sections for guidance as you take the sample documents below and make them your own. This work will allow your committee to take specific ownership of these principles in your context and will lead to a more effective plan.

### Writing Your Child Protection Policy

1. *The Biblical Foundation*—In this section, lay out the biblical and theological foundation for protecting children in the local church. It is important for your leadership and church to understand that this is not something peripheral, but central to the Bible. Protecting children is very close to God's heart. His mission is to turn his bride into a glorious reflection of his moral beauty, protecting the vulnerable as he does. Such a foundation ought to include at a minimum:
  - The God of Light and Our Calling to be Children of Light
  - God's View of Children
  - God's Heart for the Vulnerable and Hatred of Oppression
  - Our Responsibility to Protect the Vulnerable

## *Faithful Protection*

2. *Core Beliefs*—Your core beliefs briefly summarize your stance toward child protection from the biblical foundation. See the sample policy below for examples.
3. *Guiding Principles*—These are principles that flow from the biblical foundation and your core beliefs. They flesh out what it means to protect children with excellence and explain your priorities as you minister to children.
4. *Key Commitments*—These are specific policies you are committed to following regarding employees and volunteers. Such commitments should include:
  - We have a zero-tolerance policy for child abuse.
  - We report child sexual abuse to the civil authorities.
  - All employees and volunteers will be screened according to the Child Protection Procedures of \_\_\_\_\_ Church.
  - We do not employ anyone who has been convicted of or confessed to sexually abusing a child.
  - We do not allow anyone to volunteer who has been convicted of or confessed to sexually abusing a child.
  - Any employee or volunteer accused of sexually abusing a child will be immediately suspended from serving children and we will do our best to ensure they have no access to children in our church or in the community until we have clarity on the situation.
  - Any employee or volunteer who does not abide by or help guard our child protection procedures and our code of conduct will not be allowed to work with children or youth.

### **Writing Your Child Protection Procedures**

1. *Introduction*—As we recommend, if this is a separate document from your Child Protection Policy document, you will want to provide a brief summary of the policy, explaining the biblical foundation and your core beliefs.
2. *Definitions*—The procedures document should include clear and helpful definitions, including:
  - Child
  - Adult
  - Student Volunteer
  - Employee
  - Child abuse
  - Child Sexual Abuse
  - Emotional Abuse
  - Mandated Reporter

You ought to consult the legal definitions of abuse in your state to be sure your definitions are compatible. The definitions of your state should at least provide a minimal starting point for your church's definitions.

3. *Screening and Eligibility for Service*—Working with children is not a right of everyone in the church. Working with children is a privilege and a responsibility because children are so precious and vulnerable. You should include proce-

## V. Writing Your Child Protection Plan

dures on how to effectively screen volunteers and staff who work with children, through background checks, interviews, and reference checks. All three steps are critical, because most offenders will not show up on a background check. Training and a sound code of conduct will also help screen any potential abusers. Some churches restrict certain volunteer positions to members and put a waiting period before someone is eligible to serve with children. There is no fail-safe system, but solid screening and eligibility procedures will help protect children.

4. *Training*—Child sexual abuse prevention training ought to be required for anyone serving in any ministry involving children or youth. Many of the dynamics of abuse are not just common sense. Training is critical to equipping adults to protect children with excellence. Require training for all staff and volunteers before they serve. We recommend having someone on staff at the church become a trained facilitator of *Stewards of Children* or a similar organization. This will allow you to conduct training as needed.
5. *Reporting*—This section needs to include a commitment to reporting child sexual abuse to the proper civil authorities. Procedures should address specifics for reporting and outline your state’s specific mandated reporting laws. The distinction between our legal obligation and our moral obligation ought to be maintained. The legal obligation we have is the bare minimum required of us. The Bible often requires much more of us. Even if your state does not identify you as a mandated reporter, this does not relieve you of your moral obligation to protect children and report.
6. *Incident Response*—This will cover procedures after a report has been made to the civil authorities. The senior pastor and the clerk of session should be informed so they can coordinate pastoral care to all parties as well as begin the steps of church discipline for the offending party. They can also make the arrangements to contact the families involved as well as the church legal and insurance representatives. The church should appoint one person who will be the official spokesperson to the media if this becomes necessary. It will also be necessary to encourage all parties who have knowledge of the incident to use biblical wisdom when speaking about it, limiting their speech to helping protect other children, aiding investigators, or bringing healing to all parties involved.
7. *Internal Investigations*—Internal investigations should never delay, interfere with, or replace an investigation by the civil authorities. It is the role of the civil authorities to investigate and prosecute the alleged crime (Romans 13:1-7). However, after this has been done, it is valuable for a church to conduct an investigation to determine where the breakdown in child protection occurred and to see what actions might be taken to address the breakdown. This might include working with someone who should have noticed some boundary violations or perhaps updating some procedures or the code of conduct.  
Another appropriate time for the church to conduct an investigation is when there has been a report of child sexual abuse but the civil authorities do not make an arrest or pursue prosecution. They might not think they can prove the

## Faithful Protection

accusation beyond a reasonable doubt. In this situation churches need to determine how to respond to the situation. Will the person accused be allowed to continue working with children? The church needs a procedure to determine a wise course of action to ensure children are protected. For example, if a volunteer has made inappropriate sexual comments to children the state might not seek to prosecute him, but certainly this person does not need to nurture and teach children.

8. *Boundary Violations*—This section will outline how you intend to handle any violations of your procedures document and your code of conduct document. There should be proper accountability for employees and volunteers who do not follow your child protection practices. Whether they are intentional or not, lapses in safe supervision put children at risk. We need to communicate that these rules are not just to cover ourselves, but they represent our attempts to love little ones with the love of Jesus. *If employees or volunteers refuse to respect and help enforce safe boundaries they cannot have the privilege and responsibility of working with our precious children.*
9. *Regular Evaluation of our Child Protection Procedures and Code of Conduct*—There should be a designated group to speak with ministry leaders and evaluate how successfully we are living up to our child protection plan. If we are always learning with a humble attitude there will always be areas for improvement. A quarterly review is recommended. The maximum time to elapse before a review should be one year.

### Writing Your Code of Conduct

A code of conduct specifies what behaviors your local church is committing to in order to keep children safe. The code of conduct should insist on appropriate boundaries for adult-child touch, forbid one adult-one child situations, and require all workers to report any reasonable suspicion of abuse to the authorities. They should be grounded in solid principles of child protection and yet specific to your ministry context. A thorough code of conduct could address the following topics (see the sample code of conduct below for a full example):

- *Brief Statement of Purpose*
- *Accountability*
- *Visibility*
- *Restricting One Adult-One Child Situations*
- *Appropriate and Inappropriate Touch*
- *Appropriate and Inappropriate Speech*
- *Discipline*
- *Technology*
- *Rules Specific to Bathroom Use*
- *Rules Specific to the Nursery*
- *Rules Specific to Overnight Activities*
- *Supervision*
- *Parental Involvement*



- *Reporting Boundary Violations*
- *Reporting Abuse*

### **Other Forms**

Here are other recommended forms (again, samples are provided below):

- *Child Protection Consent Form*
- *Personal Interview Record*
- *Reference Request*
- *Record of Reference Check*
- *Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse*
- *Boundary Violation Report*

## **VI. Sample Child Protection Plan<sup>45</sup>**

This sample child protection plan is provided for your instruction and use. Feel free to use it as a starting point for your own child protection plan or incorporate parts of it into your existing plan. This plan does not address every scenario that could arise in every ministry context. Each sample, instead, gives a basic foundation, which we suggest that you build upon and nuance according to your particular context and ministry needs. Remember also that unless you walk through the process outlined above of learning, consulting experts, and building consensus, your child protection plan will be of limited use. Good plans are necessary, but plans do not keep children safe. Knowledgeable and courageous adults keep children safe.

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<sup>45</sup> In producing these samples, we are indebted to *Adults Protecting Children* ([adultsprotectingchildren.org](http://adultsprotectingchildren.org)) and the Child Protection Committee at Covenant Life Church in Sarasota, FL.

## Child Protection Policy

\_\_\_\_\_ Church

### *The Biblical Foundation*

- ◇ *Our God is a God of light. We are called to walk in his ways as his children of light.*  
John 12:35–36, “So Jesus said to them, ‘The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.’”  
I John 1:5, “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”  
Ephesians 5:8–9, “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).”
- ◇ *Children are special in God’s sight. They are a precious gift, made in God’s own image. Jesus rebuked his disciples in righteous anger when they tried to prevent children from coming to him. Jesus welcomes children and gives them a central place in his kingdom.*  
Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”  
Psalm 127:3, “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.”  
Mark 10:13–14, “And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.’”
- ◇ *God hears the prayers of children who are abused. Some of Jesus’ harshest words were reserved for those who would cause a child to stumble.*  
Exodus 22:21–24, “You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.”  
Psalm 10:17–18, “O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.”  
Matthew 18:5–6, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

## Faithful Protection

- ◇ *Children are valued by God, but also vulnerable spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, and morally. God hates the oppression of the vulnerable. God recognizes the temptation for the powerful to use their power for the exploitation of the weak and condemns anyone who would thus abuse their power.*

Deuteronomy 10:17-19, "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt."

Psalms 9:9, "The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble."

Luke 4:18-19, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

- ◇ *As his redeemed image bearers, his children of light, God calls us to speak up and use our power for the protection of the vulnerable. When we intervene on behalf of the vulnerable we are reflecting the moral beauty of our God. When we remain silent, or we abuse power by harming the vulnerable, we are denying the glorious moral purity of God. This is why the abuse of power is so personal to God.*

Leviticus 19:13-15, "You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor."

Job 29:11-17, "When the ear heard, it called me blessed, and when the eye saw, it approved, because I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him. The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know. I broke the fangs of the unrighteous and made him drop his prey from his teeth."

Proverbs 31:8-9, "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy."

Ecclesiastes 4:1, "Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them."

Isaiah 1:16-17, "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's

## VI. Sample Child Protection Plan

cause.”

James 1:27 “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

### *Core Beliefs*

#### Promote, Protect, Prevent and Respond

- We believe in **promoting** healthy relationships between adults and children.
- We believe that **protecting** children is an adult’s responsibility.
- We believe in **preventing and responding** to abuse with training and accountability.

### *Guiding Principles*

The following principles guide our child protection plan. They flow from the biblical foundation and our core beliefs:

**An intergenerational church is God’s covenant plan:** \_\_\_\_\_ Church highly values the role that loving, godly adults have in discipling and nurturing children and how children bless adults in the church. Our congregation vows, at a covenant child’s baptism, to “undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child.” (PCA BCO 56-5)

**Protecting children honors Christ:** Jesus holds \_\_\_\_\_ Church accountable for protecting our children, and calls us to follow his lead in loving children. Good policies, procedures, systems and structures facilitate mutual accountability as we submit to Christ.

**We must proactively work to protect children:** Preventing and responding to child abuse takes a heavy investment of time, money and resources. However, the spiritual, emotional, physical and financial toll of child abuse is far greater if passively allowed.

**Up-to-date child protection is in everyone’s best interest:** Churches that practice good child protection procedures protect children as well as adults who serve children because training and accountability will build trust among parents, volunteers and church staff.

**Child protection requires humility:** As Christians, we confess our spiritual brokenness and sin, and therefore, we must all humbly submit to boundaries established around children. Moreover, those who have committed child sexual abuse and other crimes against children will not be allowed to serve with children.

**The church is a place for sinners:** We want to be a church that is safe for hurting, broken people to come and find grace, hope and healing. Prioritizing child protection creates an environment of humility and accountability where such healing can take place.

**First-rate protection:** because any setting where children are present may be sought out by those wishing to harm them, we aspire to be a place where parents walk in and sense that their children will be loved and safe. We also want to conform to the most up-to-date laws and research about child abuse and abuse prevention. In this way, \_\_\_\_\_ Church can be known as the safest place in our city for children.

**Protecting every child:** \_\_\_\_\_ Church’s child protection plan applies to any child, eighteen and under, at any \_\_\_\_\_ Church activity.

## *Faithful Protection*

### *Key Commitments*

- ◇ We have a zero-tolerance policy for child abuse.
- ◇ We report child sexual abuse to the civil authorities.
- ◇ All employees and volunteers will be screened according to the Child Protection Procedures of \_\_\_\_\_ Church.
- ◇ We do not employ anyone who has been convicted of or confessed to sexually abusing a child.
- ◇ We do not allow anyone to volunteer who has been convicted of or confessed to sexually abusing a child.
- ◇ Any employee or volunteer accused of sexually abusing a child will be immediately suspended from serving children and we will do our best to ensure they have no access to children in our church or in the community until we have clarity on the situation.
- ◇ Any employee or volunteer who does not abide by or help guard our child protection procedures and our code of conduct will not be allowed to work with children or youth.

## Child Protection Procedures

\_\_\_\_\_ Church  
Last Updated: 01/01/14

### *Introduction*

Children have a special place as members of God’s covenant family (Genesis 17:7). They are a precious gift, made in God’s own image (Psalm 127:3; Genesis 1:27). Jesus commanded his disciples to “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). Jesus places children at the center of his kingdom. At the same time, Jesus knows that children occupy a vulnerable place in the world. Jesus reserved some of his harshest words for those who would harm or belittle children saying, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:5–6). God charges his people to care for and protect the most vulnerable members because he is the God of the vulnerable and the oppressed (Deuteronomy 10:17–19; Psalm 9:9; Psalm 10:17–18; Leviticus 19:13–15; Job 29:11–17).

We are committed to promoting a safe environment for all children at \_\_\_\_\_ Church. Working toward this goal, we believe in promoting healthy relationships between adults and children. We will not tolerate any form of abusive behavior—verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual. The responsibility for promoting a safe environment for the protection of children rests on all adults at \_\_\_\_\_ Church. We have committed to the following procedures as we seek to prevent and respond to abuse with sound training and appropriate accountability.

### *Definitions*

**Child**—Any person under the age of 18 years old or any person whose mental capacity is that of a minor.

**Adult**—Any person at least 18 years of age.

**Student Volunteer**—Any person, under the age of 18, who supervises children at a church-sponsored activity or program.

**Employee**—Any adult paid for their work at \_\_\_\_\_ Church.

**Child Abuse**—Any willful act, omission, or threatened act that results in any physical, mental or sexual injury or harm.

**Child Sexual Abuse**—Any sexual act between an adult and a child, or between two children, when one exerts power over the other; forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act; sexual abuse also includes non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or internet.

**Emotional Abuse**—When a child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, but instead endures an environment of constant criticism, belittling,

## *Faithful Protection*

persistent threatening, or bullying.

**Mandated Reporter**—Any person who is required by law to report when they have a reason to believe child abuse has occurred; in our state, \_\_\_\_\_ are mandated reporters; however, in keeping with biblical principles, for the sake of vulnerable children who cannot protect themselves, all adults are morally obligated to report abuse.

### *Screening and Eligibility for Service*

1. All adults who work with children will submit the necessary information for a national, criminal background check before being allowed access to children. This information must be updated by all adults who work with children every three years. Any adult who has been convicted of child abuse or other violent crimes will not be eligible for employment at \_\_\_\_\_ Church or service as a volunteer within \_\_\_\_\_ Church's nursery, children's and student ministries.
2. All adults and student volunteers who work with children will give three non-related, personal references who can answer questions about how said staff or volunteer interacts with children. A designated person shall check all references.
3. All adults and student volunteers who work with children will interview with the employee who will supervise their work.
4. All adults and student volunteers who work with children must be members of \_\_\_\_\_ Church for six months prior to service (with exceptions made for paid staff).

### *Training*

1. Before supervising children in any capacity, all adults must attend *Stewards of Children*, child sexual abuse prevention training. All adults who work with children must attend *Stewards of Children* again, after three years of service.
2. Before supervising children in any capacity, adults and student volunteers must read and agree to follow the child protection plan of \_\_\_\_\_ Church. Every year, all adults and student volunteers who work with children must read and agree to our child protection plan.

### *Reporting*

God has ordained civil authorities to be his servant. As God's servant, he gives civil authorities the power of the sword to punish those who do evil. God calls us to submit to these authorities as they carry out their God-ordained role to punish evil (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-14). A key aspect of our submission to the God-ordained civil authorities is to report the crime of child abuse. Child abuse is not only a sin, but a felony. Furthermore, our state's mandated reporting laws make it a crime to know about child abuse and refuse to report. All adults in our state are mandated reporters and legally responsible to report child abuse.<sup>46</sup>

All adults at \_\_\_\_\_ Church are required by law and encouraged by our leadership to report child abuse in the following circumstances:

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<sup>46</sup> Be sure to know the law in your state.



## VI. Sample Child Protection Plan

1. *Witness*—you witness or discover an act of abuse. In this situation you must demonstrate courage. You must intervene and move the child to a safe place and call the authorities immediately. Then, contact the senior pastor and complete our “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form. The pastor can then ensure the perpetrator has no further access to children at the church and can initiate appropriate pastoral care for all parties.
2. *Disclosure*—a child tells you of abuse they experienced. In this situation, remain calm and keep the child talking with open-ended questions rather than leading questions (for example, “What happened next? Can you tell me more?”) as long as the child feels comfortable. When the child has finished the disclosure, tell the child you believe them, it is not their fault, and you are going to help them. After the initial disclosure, do not try to conduct a lengthy interview, but as soon as is practical, while being sensitive to the child, call the authorities. Then, contact the senior pastor and complete our “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form.

*Special Note:* When there is a disclosure of abuse, no one, not even the parents or the pastor ought to conduct another interview of the child or conduct an internal investigation. The authorities or child advocacy center will have someone who is trained to conduct a child forensic interview. The more interviews the child has, the harder it is on the child and on those tasked with investigating and potentially prosecuting the crime.

3. *Reasonable Cause*—you have reasonable cause that child abuse has occurred. Reasonable cause does not require absolute proof. Instead, reasonable cause means one or more signs of child abuse are present. After reporting the reasonable cause, then contact the senior pastor and complete our “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form.

Sometimes there are no visible signs of child sexual abuse, but common signs include:

- A. Bleeding, bruising, pain or other signs of *trauma* around the genitalia (please note when changing a diaper this is very different from a diaper rash)
- B. Sexually transmitted disease in a child
- C. Sexual language and behavior that are not age-appropriate (including promiscuous behavior)
- D. Repeated boundary violations by an adult or student volunteer (e.g. you find an adult or student volunteer isolated with a child or pushing the limits of inappropriate touch, even after being warned not to do so)
- E. Emotional and behavioral signs such as withdrawal, fear, depression, anger or swings in behavior and mood
- F. Difficulty sitting or walking without pain

### *Incident Response*

When a report is made about suspected child abuse, all employees and volunteers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church are encouraged to cooperate fully with any legal investiga-

## *Faithful Protection*

tion.

After contacting the authorities, all employees and volunteers at \_\_\_\_\_ Church should document their actions and knowledge with the “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form and turn the form into the church office in a sealed envelope.

Any adults who report suspected child abuse to the authorities should then contact \_\_\_\_\_ Church’s senior pastor. The senior pastor will then initiate pastoral care for all parties and any disciplinary measures that may need to be taken. The senior pastor will also inform the clerk of the session, the church’s legal representative, and the church’s insurance company. Any media inquiries should be directed to the senior pastor. In the event that the senior pastor is personally involved in the incident, either as the accused or family of the victim, the associate pastor will fulfill these duties.

After all the necessary reports have been made, \_\_\_\_\_ Church encourages everyone involved in the incident to use biblical wisdom when speaking about it. While \_\_\_\_\_ Church does not require a strict confidentiality, we would ask anyone who reports to use their knowledge of the incident for a godly purpose, speaking only of the incident in times and places that will help further protect children, aid investigators, or bring healing to all parties involved.

### ***Internal Investigations***

When suspected abuse is reported to the civil authorities and the suspected abuse occurred on \_\_\_\_\_ Church’s property or ministry event, \_\_\_\_\_ Church’s child protection committee will perform an internal investigation of the incident. Without interfering with the civil authorities’ investigation, the child protection committee’s investigation will seek to discover the following:

1. Did adults and volunteers follow all of \_\_\_\_\_ Church’s child protection policies?
2. If not, what caused the failure to follow the policy?
3. Is there an area of our child protection policies that should be altered so that such an incident will be less likely in the future?

If a report of child sexual abuse has been made, and the civil authorities do not file charges, the child protection committee shall conduct its own investigation in cooperation with the session to determine whether the person(s) involved shall be allowed to continue working with children. Just because civil authorities do not have enough evidence to file charges, this does not mean the person is exonerated completely or is well-suited to work with children. Any recommendations should be made to the session for their final approval. Any powers of church discipline shall remain with the session; however, information and recommendations from the child protection committee will be given due consideration by the session.

### ***Boundary Violations***

\_\_\_\_\_ Church takes any violations of our child protection plan very seriously. Abusers are rarely caught in the act of harming a child, but they’re often seen breaking the rules and crossing boundaries. Every incident of boundary and rule violation does not necessarily signal that child abuse has occurred. However, every incident of boundary violation requires responsible action to ensure children’s safety.

## *VI. Sample Child Protection Plan*

Adults and student volunteers should intervene when they see anyone breaking the child protection plan, ensure all children are safe, and remind the violator of appropriate behavior around children. Adults and student volunteers should also fill out a “Boundary Violation Report” in the following circumstances: when an adult or student volunteer is found in an isolated area with a child or when an adult or student volunteer observes a repeated boundary violation by the same person. (Please note that any abuse should be stopped and then immediately reported. This only applies to boundary violations.)

Boundary violations that require intervention include but are not limited to:

- If an adult or student volunteer is in an isolated area with a child, then remind them that this is unsafe and against the church’s child protection plan. Bring the child out of the isolated area and return the child to his or her parents and inform them of the situation. Also fill out a “Boundary Violation Report.”
- If an adult or student volunteer is changing a child’s diaper on the floor, then remind them to change a child’s diaper only in the designated area.
- If an adult or student volunteer raises their voice at a child, then direct them in how to use positive reinforcement with children.
- If an adult or student volunteer tells a joke with sexual content, then ask them not to use sexual humor around children.
- If an adult or student volunteer wants to give a child a hug and the child seems uncomfortable (even in a visible area), then point out that the child seems uncomfortable and remind them that physical affection should never be forced.

### *Regular Evaluation of our Procedures and Code of Conduct*

\_\_\_\_\_ Church’s child protection committee will meet quarterly to evaluate and update the child protection procedures and code of conduct. Recommended updates will be presented to the session for approval.

# Code of Conduct

\_\_\_\_\_ Church  
Last Updated: 01/01/14

## *Statement of Purpose*

Our goal is to protect the precious little ones that Jesus welcomes with open arms (Mark 10:14). Children are vulnerable and need protection. As adults it is our task to ensure that children are safe by abiding by the following code of conduct.

## *Accountability*

When it comes to protecting children, we all ought to be accountable to one another for our actions. It is our individual and collective choices that will determine whether our church is a safe environment for children. We honor the Lord when we hold each other accountable for the purpose of protecting children made in his image. Whenever children are present, two unrelated adults must be present to ensure accountability. Every ministry activity ought to be open and interruptible. All adults, whether an employee or volunteer, and all student volunteers are subject to this code of conduct.

## *Visibility*

As much as possible, ministry with children and youth ought to occur in highly visible areas. Observability is a key factor in minimizing the risk of abuse. This means utilizing open spaces, classrooms with big windows, and avoiding isolated areas.

## *Restricting One Adult-One Child Situations*

Most abuse happens in one adult-one child situations. We strive to eliminate all of these situations because they are such high risk. This does not mean there cannot be any private conversation between an adult and a child. However, these conversations need to take place in an open and observable area. All activities involving children must have at least two adults supervising at all times. For our purposes, any related adults shall count as one adult.

## *Appropriate and Inappropriate Touch*

By God's design, appropriate touch is an important way for us to understand that we are loved. Appropriate touch is observable by other adults. A hug in the context of a group is very different from a hug behind closed doors. Touch should be welcomed by the child. Any resistance by the child should be immediately respected. Because healthy, caring touch is valuable to children but unhealthy touch is abusive, the following guidelines apply:

- Touch shall be open rather than secretive.
- Touch should show care for the child rather than meet a need in the adult.
- Touch should be age- and developmentally appropriate.
- Touch should normally be initiated by the child rather than the adult.

## VI. Sample Child Protection Plan

- Touch should always communicate respect for the child.
- Touch should immediately cease if the child is in any way uncomfortable.

Adults and other youth or children should not hit, slap, pinch, push, hold against their will, or otherwise assault children.

The following signs of affection are generally appropriate within the guidelines above:

- Verbal praise
- Side hugs and shoulder to shoulder hugs
- High fives and fist bumps
- Pats on the shoulder, back, or head (when culturally appropriate)

For smaller children, the following are generally appropriate with other adults around and within the guidelines above:

- Touching hands, shoulders, and arms
- Hugs
- Holding them when others are present

The following behaviors between employees or volunteers and children are inappropriate, or they may at least be perceived as inappropriate. Please refrain from:

- Touching buttocks, chests, genital areas, or thighs
- Full body hugs
- Kissing
- Tickling
- Showing affection in isolated areas or when alone with a child
- Sleeping in bed with a child
- Inappropriate comments that relate to physique or body development
- Flirtatious or seductive looks
- Showing sexually suggestive content or playing sexually suggestive games
- Any form of affection that is unwanted by the child
- Any behavior that could be interpreted as sexual in nature

Adults shall monitor each other, youth, and older children in the area of physical contact, helping each other follow these guidelines and pointing out anything that could be misinterpreted.

### ***Appropriate and Inappropriate Speech***

Words are a wonderful way to build one another up. Words can give encouragement and impart grace to the hearer (Ephesians 4:29). We must speak words that give life, such as praise, positive reinforcement, and speaking the truth in love. At the same time we must avoid words that harm. We will all commit to refrain from inappropriate verbal interaction such as: shaming, belittling, name calling, using harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate a child, cursing, or making derogatory remarks about a child. Inappropriate verbal interaction also includes telling off-color or sexual jokes, making sexually suggestive comments, telling inappropriate secrets, or inappropriately discussing sexual encounters or desires with children.

Adults shall avoid favoring or showing preferential treatment to particular children or youth.

### ***Discipline***

Discipline ought to be corrective and not punitive. We do not permit anyone other than a parent to administer corporal punishment to a child. Furthermore, discipline should never include yelling, shaming, or in any way belittling a child. If there is a serious incident that requires discipline, it is always wise to involve the parent.

### ***Technology***

Any employee or volunteer working with children or youth is responsible to ensure that any technology is used appropriately. We must monitor any use of phones, the internet, TV, and movies when children are in our care. Technology can quickly be turned from a proper use into something that is used for exploitation. All pornography and any other sexually explicit or suggestive content is strictly prohibited. Any bullying, online or otherwise, will not be tolerated and should be reported to parents and appropriate staff. Adults should refrain from developing a relationship with a child or youth primarily over electronic media (text, IM, etc.), since this is not open and observable. Any sexual conversation between an adult and a child over electronic media is abusive and is strictly prohibited.

### ***Rules Specific to Bathroom Use***

No adult should take a child to the bathroom alone. Elementary children should be sent to the bathroom in groups of at least two or three. If a child is potty training, an adult should ensure the bathroom is safe before allowing such a small child to enter alone. Encourage the child to go on their own. If the child needs assistance, involve another adult to ensure there is no one adult-one child situation. When assisting, allow for accountability while respecting the privacy of the child as much as possible.

### ***Rules Specific to the Nursery***

Small children are extremely vulnerable. We must ensure there is good visibility and adequate staff and volunteers to supervise the nursery. We encourage women to change diapers unless the man is the father of the child. When changing diapers, inform another nursery worker, and change the diaper quickly and with respect for the child. Diapers should only be changed in designated areas where we can maintain the boundaries of openness and observability.

### ***Supervision***

Regular supervision helps reduce risk. Every activity is interruptible and we are all accountable to one another. Program supervisors shall frequently and randomly stop in to observe the nursery, classrooms, and other areas where children and adults are together.

### ***Parental Involvement***

Parents are responsible for knowing where their children are at all times. We encourage parents to drop by unannounced to observe any activity in which their child is participating. Along with other adults, parents have a key role to play in keeping their children safe. The involvement of watchful parents, who make unannounced visits, leads to a safer environment for all children. Parents are encouraged to be educated in our procedures and code of conduct and help with their enforcement.

## VI. *Sample Child Protection Plan*

### ***Reporting Boundary Violations***

For the safety of all children in our care, we are all responsible to help ensure the boundaries set forth in this code of conduct are followed. The Bible commends those who have a teachable spirit and are open to correction (Proverbs 9:8; 13:18). Therefore, we must all pledge to remind each other if a boundary is being crossed. Every boundary violation requires responsible action from adults. Our expectation is that you will intervene when a boundary is crossed. Working with children is a huge privilege and responsibility because our children are so valuable. *Those who are unwilling to guard proper boundaries cannot work with our children.* When a boundary is crossed, kindly but firmly remind the person of the boundary and make sure the situation is safe. It might also be appropriate to fill out a *Boundary Violation Report* and submit it to the church office. All reports will be kept confidential. Cases where it would be appropriate would include but not be limited to: repeat boundary violations, an attitude of resistance to boundaries, and an especially dangerous boundary violation (such as an adult being all alone with a child in an isolated area). These can be difficult decisions, but you must follow your conscience and our procedures. If something is not right it is better to speak to someone about it. Abusers are rarely caught in the act of abuse, but they are often caught crossing boundaries. We must see the signs and intervene.

### ***Reporting Child Sexual Abuse***

When anyone has reason to suspect or has knowledge of child abuse within the scope of the church's ministry, he or she must report it to the civil authorities and inform the senior pastor. If the senior pastor is involved in the incident, report to another pastor or the clerk of session. You will then need to fill out a Knowledge of Suspected Abuse form and submit it to the church office in a sealed envelope.

**Child Protection Consent Form**

\_\_\_\_\_ Church

I acknowledge that I have received and read a copy of \_\_\_\_\_ Church's Child Protection Policy, Child Protection Procedures, and Code of Conduct.

I understand these documents and agree to abide by them.

Furthermore, I agree to hold others accountable to follow them.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name



**Personal Interview Record**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview questions should include but not be limited to:

Tell us about how you become a Christian?

What is your relationship like with God right now?

What motivates you when you think about working with children?

In what capacities have you worked with children before?

Where do you see your strengths and weaknesses in working with children?

Have you read our child protection documents? What do you think about them? Are you willing to submit to their requirements and help others follow them?

If you discovered a child alone with another adult in an isolated area, what would you do?

If you overheard another adult telling a sexual joke what would you do?

Additional Comments (use the back if needed):

**Reference Request**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Adult or student volunteer name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list three personal references that we may contact (no relatives please).

*Reference #1*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, state, zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to reference: \_\_\_\_\_

*Reference #2*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, state, zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to reference: \_\_\_\_\_

*Reference #3*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, state, zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to reference: \_\_\_\_\_

**Record of Reference Check**

Reference record for (adult or student volunteer's name): \_\_\_\_\_

References checked by: \_\_\_\_\_

*Reference #1:*

Reference Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Method of communication:

Reference questions should include but not be limited to:

What is your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_?

How long have you known \_\_\_\_\_?

In what capacity have you seen \_\_\_\_\_ working with children (or students)?

How would you describe \_\_\_\_\_'s ability to relate to children (or students)?

What do you think \_\_\_\_\_'s strength are in working with children?

What are areas where \_\_\_\_\_ could improve as he/she interacts with children?

## *Faithful Protection*

When \_\_\_\_\_ interacted with children, did he/she know and respect the boundaries (or policies) for your organization (family, etc.) around children? If not, please explain.

Do you know of any characteristics that would negatively affect \_\_\_\_\_'s ability to work with children?

Would you recommend that \_\_\_\_\_ work with children in our organization?

Additional Questions/Comments:

*Reference #2:*

Reference Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Method of communication:

Reference questions should include but not be limited to:

What is your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_?

How long have you known \_\_\_\_\_?

In what capacity have you seen \_\_\_\_\_ working with children (or students)?

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How would you describe \_\_\_\_\_'s ability to relate to children (or students)?

What do you think \_\_\_\_\_'s strengths are in working with children?

What are areas where \_\_\_\_\_ could improve as he/she interacts with children?

When \_\_\_\_\_ interacted with children, did he/she know and respect the boundaries (or policies) for your organization (family, etc.) around children? If not, please explain.

Do you know of any characteristics that would negatively affect \_\_\_\_\_'s ability to work with children?

Would you recommend that \_\_\_\_\_ work with children in our organization?

Additional Questions/Comments:

*Reference #3:*

Reference Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Method of communication:

Reference questions should include but not be limited to:

## *Faithful Protection*

What is your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_?

How long have you known \_\_\_\_\_?

In what capacity have you seen \_\_\_\_\_ working with children (or students)?

How would you describe \_\_\_\_\_'s ability to relate to children (or students)?

What do you think \_\_\_\_\_'s strength are in working with children?

What are areas where \_\_\_\_\_ could improve as he/she interacts with children?

When \_\_\_\_\_ interacted with children, did he/she know and respect the boundaries (or policies) for your organization (family, etc.) around children? If not, please explain.

Do you know of any characteristics that would negatively affect \_\_\_\_\_'s ability to work with children?

Would you recommend that \_\_\_\_\_ work with children in our organization?

Additional Questions/Comments:

*VI. Sample Child Protection Plan*

**Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse**

Name of staff or volunteer observing or receiving disclosure of child sexual abuse:

\_\_\_\_\_

Victim's Name and Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/place of incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person accused of abuse: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship of accused to victim (paid staff, volunteer, family member, other):

Summary of Incident (use the back of this sheet if you need more space):

Date/Time civil authorities were notified: \_\_\_\_\_

Person who called the civil authorities: \_\_\_\_\_

Church officers notified (usually Senior Pastor): \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time of notification: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time child's parent/guardian was notified: \_\_\_\_\_

Person who contacted family: \_\_\_\_\_

Family member contacted: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary of conversation:

Other action taken (e.g. contacting Child Advocacy Group):

## Boundary Violation Report

Any adult or student volunteer who observes any other adult or student volunteer in an isolated area with a child or observes any other adult or student volunteer repeatedly violating boundaries, should use this form to create a record of the incident. Turn this form into the church administrative assistant in a sealed envelope.

Adult or student volunteer involved in the incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Child/children involved in the incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Location(s) of boundary violation(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) of boundary violation(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Circumstances of the violation(s). Give as much detail as you can remember (use the back of this sheet if you need more space):

Any actions taken in response to boundary violation(s):

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## VII. Recommended Resources

### *Understanding and Preventing Child Sexual Abuse*

- ◇ “Sexual Abuse in Christian Organizations” by Dr. Diane Langberg (available at [www.netgrace.org/resources/](http://www.netgrace.org/resources/))
- ◇ *Protecting Children from Abuse in the Church: Steps to Prevent and Respond* by Basyle Tchividjian (New Growth Press, 2013)
- ◇ “Suffer the Children: Developing Effective Church Policies on Child Maltreatment” by Victor I. Vieth (available at [www.netgrace.org/resources/](http://www.netgrace.org/resources/))
- ◇ *This Little Light: Beyond a Baptist Preacher Predator and His Gang* by Christa Brown (Foremost Press, 2009)
- ◇ *On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church* by Deepak Reju (Forthcoming, New Growth Press, 2014).
- ◇ *Predators: Pedophiles, Rapists, & Other Sex Offenders: Who They Are, How They Operate, and How We Can Protect Ourselves and Our Children* by Anna Salter (Basic Books, 2003)
- ◇ “Christians and the struggle to report child abuse” by Basyle Tchividjian (available at [www.boz.religionnews.com/](http://www.boz.religionnews.com/))
- ◇ “Sex offenders in the church: From apathy to action” by Lynette Frantzen (available at [www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org))
- ◇ “The High Cost of Negligence” by Jamie Dean (available at [www.worldmag.com](http://www.worldmag.com))
- ◇ “Fear at Fanda” by Jamie Dean (available at [www.worldmag.com](http://www.worldmag.com))
- ◇ “What Would Walther Do? Applying Law & Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse” by Victor I. Vieth (available at [www.netgrace.org](http://www.netgrace.org))
- ◇ “Key Questions about Child Sexual Abuse in the Church” by Mike Sloan (available at [www.byfaithonline.com](http://www.byfaithonline.com))

### *Ministry to Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*

- ◇ *On the Threshold of Hope: Opening the Door to Hope for Survivors of Sexual Abuse* by Diane Langberg (Tyndale House, 1999)
- ◇ *Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse* by Diane Langberg (Xulon Press, 2003)
- ◇ *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault* by Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb (Crossway Books, 2011)
- ◇ “The Spiritual Impact of Abuse” by Diane Langberg (available at [www.netgrace.org/resources/](http://www.netgrace.org/resources/))
- ◇ *The Long Journey Home: Understanding & Ministering to the Sexually Abused: A Collaborative Address from Psychology, Theology, and Pastoral Care* edited by Andrew J. Schmutzer (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011)
- ◇ *Bringing Christ to Abused Women: Learning to See and Respond* by Diane Langberg (New Growth Press, 2013)

*Recommended Organizations for Resources, Training, and Consultation*

- ◇ Adults Protecting Children—[www.adultsprotectingchildren.org](http://www.adultsprotectingchildren.org)
- ◇ Darkness to Light—[www.darkness2light.org](http://www.darkness2light.org)
- ◇ G.R.A.C.E. (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment)—[www.netgrace.org](http://www.netgrace.org)
- ◇ Ministry Safe—[www.ministrysafe.org](http://www.ministrysafe.org)
- ◇ Boz Tchividjian’s Blog on Child Sexual Abuse Prevention: Rhymes with Religion—[www.boz.religionnews.com](http://www.boz.religionnews.com)

*Recommended Organizations for Counseling and Recovery*

- ◇ Diane Langberg and Associates—[www.dianelangberg.com](http://www.dianelangberg.com)
- ◇ Together We Heal—[www.together-we-heal.org](http://www.together-we-heal.org)
- ◇ Committed to Freedom, Abuse Recovery Solutions—[www.committedtofreedom.org](http://www.committedtofreedom.org)
- ◇ American Association of Christian Counselors—[www.aacc.net](http://www.aacc.net)

## VIII. Addendum: Parents Preventing Abuse

As parents, one of our worst nightmares is someone harming our children. There is no sure-fire way to abuse-proof our children, and children can be abused whether they come from loving families or not. While some things are out of our control, many are within our control. Those things that are within our control, when implemented well, can reduce the risk of our children being abused or set them up for healing if they are abused.

### **Become Your Child's Advocate**

The best way parents protect their children is to advocate for safe environments. Ask good questions about any person or any organization that has oversight of your children. When we sign our children up for an activity such as church nursery, soccer, music lessons, or tutoring, we should ask how the organization screens their employees. Do they perform background checks, interviews, and reference checks? Ask if they have a child protection plan. Have their employees been trained in abuse prevention? Do all their employees know and abide by the child protection plan? Ask if parents can drop in and observe without an appointment.

Then, drop in unannounced. Look around at the facilities where your children will be. Are there isolated places? Is it visible and interruptible? Are people in and out of the facility who should not be there? It may feel awkward to ask all these questions and think through these scenarios, but it is worth the effort. Follow your gut instinct and if something about the situation feels off, follow up on that instinct until you feel satisfied that your child is safe. If your questions are never satisfied, do not allow your child to participate.

When leaving children with a nanny or babysitter, it is particularly important to screen caregivers and lay boundaries for them because the risk to children is greater in a private home which is isolated from other adults. Asking for references, even for babysitters who only work occasionally, is a must. If the caregiver is over eighteen, run a background check. We also give our caregivers explicit instructions about our children. By laying down a few boundaries, parents send a signal that they are vigilant and if the boundaries are broken, we will notice. Here is an example of what I (Beth) go over with anyone who cares for my children:

1. We expect open and honest communication between you, the kids and us. That means...
  - a. Do not hesitate to call us if you have a question about anything.
  - b. We do not keep secrets.
2. While we are gone and the children are awake, no one should be on the internet, and you and the children may only watch designated videos. Do not show our children any videos or pictures on your phone without our permission.
3. Do not take or post pictures or video of our children on the internet or post that you are babysitting for us tonight.
4. No one else should be in our home without our approval.

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5. We play with open doors. If two people are in a room together, the door needs to be open.
6. We expect our children to treat you respectfully and for you to treat them respectfully as well. Our children understand the difference between good touch and bad touch, respectful language and disrespectful language.
7. Do not spank our children or use any form of physical punishment. Do not withhold from them, shame them or yell at them.
8. Our children should be fully clothed during your time together. If they need help in the bathroom/with a diaper change, help them quickly and with as little invasion to their privacy as possible. Do not bathe our children.
9. We will be home at \_\_\_\_\_ but we occasionally drop by to see how things are going.

### **Body Awareness**

One of the best gifts parents can give their children is accurate information about their bodies. From the time they are born, parents shape the way children talk and think about their bodies. Because God created our bodies and declared them good, there is nothing inherently shameful about them. Therefore, when parents teach their baby about her nose, they should also teach her about her vagina.

Every body part has a proper name, and we should teach our children proper names for their anatomy. A penis is a penis. A vagina is a vagina. Then, as children grow, they will naturally be curious about their bodies and sexuality. It is vital that parents answer their questions directly with as much detail as is age appropriate. A helpful guide for parenting to prevent abuse at each stage of your child's development can be found at [The Mama Bear Effect](#). We can teach our children about their bodies, and the more accurate information they have, the better.

Likewise, children from a young age can understand what private parts are and distinguish between good touch and bad touch. Young children can understand the concept that their body is their own, and that they can say no to any touch that they do not want. Parents should also tell children explicitly and regularly that if someone touches them in their private parts or in any other way that they do not like, they need to tell mommy or daddy. We should tell our children that we will believe them if they tell us and we won't be upset with them even if the person who used bad touch is someone mommy or daddy know and like.

Prepare them that someone who touches them inappropriately might tell them to keep it secret, or that mommy won't love you anymore if you tell, or that they will hurt you or mommy if you tell. Give your children some "What if..." scenarios so they are prepared. Tell them you love them so much that they need to tell you no matter what the person says because God gave you the important job of keeping them safe. Tell them how valuable they are to God and to you. At the same time, it is necessary to tell our children not to touch anyone else's private parts or force anyone to touch theirs.

These honest conversations will bear fruit for years to come in your relationship with your child. At an early age, you are reinforcing God's wisdom for sexuality and relationships. You are also building trust by handling intimate issues well. You are opening the

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lines of communication for any type of difficult issue. You are establishing yourself as the go-to person on sexuality in a cultural sea of sexual sin and confusion. As your child matures, the awkwardness will lessen because you have always been able to have frank conversation about appropriate boundaries. All of these conversations will help you connect and understand your child's heart. You will be able to understand better who they are and where they are going. This close connection will allow you to be better tuned-in to their heart so you can notice if something is off, whether or not it is abuse.

## About This Resource

This collection of information, advice, and sample forms and policies is, as has been clearly stated, provided simply for the local church as a resource. We do not claim any expertise or authority as legal experts or as psychologists or health professionals; instead, we strongly urge churches that would use this resource to seek the counsel of local professionals: child psychologists, attorneys, and insurance agents, who will be able to speak definitively to the particular needs and circumstances of your local laws and regulations, as well as other circumstances.

We are pleased to provide this information to you, nevertheless, and trust that it will be of some benefit to the leadership of your congregation as you strive to put in place policies and procedures that will protect children and families from the dangers of abuse.

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For more information about this document, as well as to download the forms included in stand-alone, editable documents, visit this website:

[www.faithfulprotection.org](http://www.faithfulprotection.org)

### About Doulos Resources

Doulos Resources exists to provide needful resources for the building up of the local church and her members. To learn more about Doulos Resources and find out about other resources that we offer, visit us online:

[www.doulosresources.org](http://www.doulosresources.org)

