

A Model For Training Workers

IMPLEMENTING A comprehensive strategy for the prevention of child abuse in a local church cannot be done without a substantial amount of education being provided for the workers with children and youth, the parents of children and youth, the congregation, and the children and youth themselves. This model is designed to be used with your church's workers with children and youth, but you may easily modify it for use with other groups. This model is designed to be used as a three- or a four-hour workshop.

I. Opening Worship

A. Prayer of Invocation - Gracious and most merciful God, you have brought us together in witness to your love of all children. Open our hearts and minds in this moment and prepare us to receive your message. Show us your will and fill us to overflowing with courage to face the reality of child abuse. Give us energy and dedication enough to make this, your church, a holy and hallowed place where all your children may be safe and secure as they grow in faith and in their knowledge of your presence in their lives! Amen.

B. Suggested Scriptures

1. Exodus 22:21-23
2. Matthew 19:14
3. Luke 9:46-48

C. Brief Devotion - You may begin by recalling the baptismal ritual for children, reminding the participants of the pledge made by the congregation at each child's baptism. Acknowledge and list the many ways your congregation lives out that pledge through its current ministries with children. Conclude by introducing the child abuse prevention strategy as the newest component of your church's ministries with children and youth.

II. Introductory Information

A. Current Occurrences - Set the stage here for the substance of the event by introducing recent news reports from your own community's newspapers or television broadcasts related to incidents of child abuse in any locations and institutions. Also, in this section, present the material related to any current litigation involving the church and claims of child abuse.

B. Current Statistics - Quote the statistical information from this resource or from other sources available to you. Work the math on a chalkboard or newsprint to show how two million annual incidents finally translate into one incident of abuse every fifteen seconds.

When child abuse occurs in our own neighborhoods, it gets our attention and sometimes serves as a catalyst in a way that nameless and faceless children counted in statistics cannot. However, it is important to be familiar with a few statistics:

- The National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect reports that there are more than two million incidents of physical abuse and/or neglect per year in the USA. That amounts to 30 out of every 1000 children.
- Studies have estimated that 1 out of 3 girls is sexually abused before the age of 18. Similarly, studies indicate 1 out of 7 boys have been sexually abused before the age of 18. Even more frightening is that these numbers may be underestimated since many children are reluctant to report abuse.

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

Let's think again about the first number listed: two million incidents of abuse per year. That equals 5,479 children abused each day; approximately 228 children abused per hour; nearly 4 (3.8) children abused per minute; and one child abused every 15 seconds, night or day, weekday or weekend, Sabbath or otherwise!

C. Reasons to Implement a Child Abuse Prevention Strategy

1. Our church is a community of faith that can offer a safe haven and sanctuary where children and youth can seek advice, help, and nurture.
2. Our church is a place where more than just facts of child abuse can be taught. We can also teach and proclaim our Christian values: compassion, justice, repentance, and grace.
3. Our church is the place where children can come and learn and develop the inner strength and spiritual resources they will need to feel truly connected to God and to face suffering and evil.
4. Our church can be the place where children and adults are able to learn how to respond to painful and confusing events using the wisdom of the Scriptures.

D. Summarize - These reports and data demonstrate that we cannot ignore the possibility that abuse could happen here. For the sake of our children and the protection of our workers against false allegations, we need to intentionally work to prevent abuse.

III. What is Abuse and How Can We Recognize It?

- A. Physical abuse – Violent non-accidental contact which results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.
- B. Emotional abuse – A pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a child's spirit and attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.
- C. Sexual abuse – Any form of sexual activity with a child, whether at the Church, at home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another minor.

IV. Who Are Abusers? The Balance of Power

Discuss the concepts of power and vulnerability and how these can lead to abuse. Use the news reports you shared earlier to help demonstrate the balance-of-power concept. In each account, have the participants list the sources of power available to the abuser

- Abusers can be found in every racial, ethnic, economic and social group.
- Abusers look very much like us; some are charismatic leaders; some are very sociable; some are very sympathetic to troubled children; some are married and have children; some are young and some are older adults.

How Does Abuse Happen?

- Abuse happens when a person exerts his or her power over a child in ways that harm and/or exploit the child.
- The abuser is powerful; the child is vulnerable.
- The power comes from several sources: size, position, knowledge, money and others.

Have the participants identify the factors that made the child vulnerable to the abuser. If time allows, you may use a video here to illustrate the concepts you have just addressed. The bibliography and resource list at the end of this book provide suggestions of appropriate videos or sources for videos.

V. Maintaining a Positive Classroom Environment

Maintaining a positive classroom environment will encourage good behavior by the students and improve the learning process. As the teacher or leader in the learning environment, you will want to always find the positive way of speaking and working with the young people in your care. Keeping your voice on a level tone goes a long way in keeping the noise level in the classroom to an appropriate level. The louder you talk, the louder the noise level will be. Always find as many positive ways to acknowledge the students in your care as possible.

A. Appropriate Discipline – A well-designed and managed program prevents misbehavior by: limiting the number of children in a classroom; having adequate staff; discouraging competition; encouraging children to express feelings, and be empathetic; and developing and discussing rules of conduct. The purpose for setting disciplinary guidelines is to enable children to develop internal control mechanisms that foster growth and promote societal values. Children must be trained in basic rules of conduct. (More specific information is available in some curriculum materials and a book by Group Publishing, “The Discipline Guide” by Jody Capehart, Gordon West & Becki West.)

B. Age-Level Characteristics – Knowing what is appropriate for each age level enhances the learning by our students. Each level has its own unique aspects that when they are acknowledged and planned for, produces more learning and less discipline problems. Here are some sample ideas, more can be found in curriculum resources and educational textbooks.

Ages 3-6:

Moral Development: Preschoolers are very “me-oriented.” They are the center of their own worlds. Their entire view of right and wrong – along with their faith – is based upon what influential models (such as parents and teachers) tell them.

Cognitive Level: Preschoolers’ play is symbolic of real life.

Ages 6-8:

Moral Development: For younger children, the moral code is “an eye for an eye.” If they are pinched, they pinch back. Personal values are rooted in a “law and order” approach. Things that benefit young children are almost always seen as right, whereas harmful things are almost always viewed as wrong. The world, like their faith, is black and white.

Cognitive Level: Young children think in concrete terms about the ideas and concepts they’re learning. They need help understanding symbolic or abstract ideas.

Ages 9-12:

Moral Development: Children at this age begin to see shades of gray in their world. They question authority more and understand that individual values can impact the lives of others. They also begin to understand that doing “wrong things” means more than just “getting into trouble” or facing punishment from parents or teachers. Faith becomes a working, personal faith.

Cognitive Level: Older children continue to think in concrete terms, although by

the end of childhood they can more readily understand abstract concepts.

C. Reasonable Ratios Between Adults and Students: The two adult rule should always be encouraged. This is a safety issue as well as help in handling the students. Ratios differ by age group but as a general rule: 3:1 for children under the age of 3; 5:1 for children between the ages of 3 and 6; 10:1 is a good rule of thumb for the rest. These are guidelines which should give you a sensitivity to the number of adults and students together in any one setting.

VI. Appropriate Behavior for Teachers and Leaders

Appropriate behavior shows how we value and respect our students. The following are specific ways that are good ways to interact with your students:

- Listening to them and discerning their needs is crucial to preventing difficulties.
- Establishing a sense of trust early in the life of a class or group is essential to communication, cooperation and creating a safe environment..
- Taking an interest in your students, being mindful of playing favorites and being fair are key ingredients to creating healthy relationships.
 - Taking students aside when possible during times of confrontation allows them to save face.

Making judicious use of the following behaviors can aid in communicating with your students:

- make eye contact
- use safe touch (shoulder, hand)
- be clear regarding acceptable behavior
- kneel to be on same physical level
- use activities to keep students involved
- take time to learn about each student's interests
- listen and be sensitive to the quiet, shy student

VII. What Are We Doing to Keep Our Children and Workers Safe?

Present the new policies and procedures for the prevention of child abuse. Give participants time to read the policies. Allow time for questions and discussion as you review each section with the group.

A. Screening of Staff: Employees and Volunteers - Use the Conference Policy with the Guidelines and Requirements for this section. Provide copies of all screening forms, application forms, covenant forms, consent forms, and position description forms. Allow time for a review of each form and for questions from the participants.

B. Training of Staff: Employees and Volunteers - Use the Conference Policy with the Guidelines and Requirements for this section. Be thorough in reviewing all of the safety procedures, and allow time for questions.

C. Reporting Suspected Abuse - Use your policies and the information in this resource to explain the reporting procedure developed for your church. Explain the policy, the procedure for making a report, and the concept of confidentiality.

D. Completing the Task - If this is the first occasion the workers have had to see and review

the screening, application, and position description forms, you may need to allow time for each of them to complete a form.

VIII. Appropriate Interpersonal Boundaries

Appropriate boundaries refers to appropriateness in how we play with our students. We need to know the difference between child-like and childish behavior. It also refers to appropriate touch in the classroom or other group settings.

The following are acceptable ways for touching a student:

- on the hand (especially with younger children), shoulder or upper back
- in the company of other adults
- never against a student's will (unless in the case of clear and present danger to them)
- never against a student's verbally or non-verbally expressed discomfort
- never when it would have the effect of over-stimulating a student
- never in a place on a student's body that is normally covered by a bathing suit

Behaviors that might be misunderstood as intrusive or invasive to students:

- embarrassing a student about his or her body
- a student sitting in a leader's lap
- telling stories or engaging in conversation that is lurid or over-stimulating.
- giving someone a deep back massage.

IX. Closing Worship

A. Covenant Forms - Have one or two people distribute covenant forms to the participants. Say, "We have reached the end of our time together today. Let's prepare to celebrate our church's commitment to protecting our children, youth, and those who work with them. (There is a Participant Covenant in the Conference Packet in Appendix V.) Please read the covenant you have just received, and sign it as your commitment to our church's ministry with children and youth."

B. Return to the Scripture reading from opening worship. Read aloud the verses from Luke 9:46-48.

C. Invite the participants to pray responsively with you by saying, after each sentence prayer, "We welcome the children!"

Leader: O God, by our presence here today,

People: We welcome the children!

Leader: O God, by our promise in Holy Baptism,

People: We welcome the children!

Leader: O God, by our participation in the ministries of this congregation.

People: We welcome the children!

Leader: O God, by our commitment to keeping this place holy and safe in every way.

People: We welcome the children!

Leader: O God, give us wisdom, strength, and courage enough to show the world that

People: We welcome the children!

All: Amen!

D. Offering - Ask the participants to bring forward their signed covenant forms as a sign of offering themselves in ministry with children and youth. Sing the Doxology.

E. Benediction - May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit guide and direct you in all you do. Amen.



Other Sources and Resources

These organizations have helpful information and resource materials about child abuse. Materials from these organizations are available upon request.

Organizations:

Childhelp USA - 6463 Independence Avenue - Woodland Hills, CA 91367

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children - 2101 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 550 Arlington, VA 22201

National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse (NCPA) - 332 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1600 - Chicago, IL 60604

Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence - 936 North 34th Street, Suite 200 Seattle, WA 98103

Nonprofit Risk Management Center - 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 900 Washington, DC 20036

United Methodist Communications - 810 12th Avenue South - Nashville, TN 37203 615/742 5400

Children's Defense Fund - 25 E Street NW - Washington, DC 20001 www.childrensdefense.org

Your state and/or county child and family protective services department.

Risk Management Department
General Council on Finance and Admin.
1200 Davis Street
Evanston, IL 60201-4193 847/869-3345

The National Court-Appointed Special

Advocate Association - 100 West Harrison Street North Tower, Suite 500 - Seattle, WA 98119-4123

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information - PO Box 1182 Washington, DC 20013-1182

National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse - 99 Canal Center Plaza Alexandria, VA 22314

National Children's Advocacy Center - 200 Westside Square - Huntsville, AL 35801

Office of Children's Ministries General Board of Discipleship - PO Box 840 Nashville, TN 37202-0840 - 615/340-7143 www.gbod.org

These resources will guide you to many other helpful resources related to child abuse.

Carlson, Lee W. *Child Sexual Abuse: A Handbook for Clergy and Church Members*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1988.

Children's Defense Fund. *Welcome the Child: A Child Advocacy Guide for Churches*. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 1994.

Fortune, Rev. Marie M. *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1991. (Available from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.)
Horton, Anne L. and Judith A. Williamson (eds.).

Abuse & Religion: When Praying Isn't Enough. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988.
Olsen, Harriet J. (ed.). *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996.* Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1996

Patterson, John with Charles Tremper and Pam Rypkema. *Staff Screening Tool Kit: Keeping the Bad Apples Out of Your Organization.* Washington, DC: Nonprofit Risk Management Center, 1994.

Reid, Rev. Kathryn Goeing. *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: A Curriculum for Children Ages 5-8.* Cleveland: United Church Press, 1994. (Available from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.)
_, with Rev. Marie M. Fortune. *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: A Curriculum for Children Ages 9-12.* New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1990. (Available from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.)

Vbelkel-Haugen, Rebecca and Rev. Marie M. Fortune. *Sexual Abuse Prevention: A Course of Study for Teenagers.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

Web Site Resources:

Children's Forum: www.fcforum.org
Child Welfare League of America: www.cwla.org
Center for Florida's Children: www.floridakids.com
Prevent Child Abuse America: www.preventchildabuse.org
Church Safety: www.churchsafety.com

(Available from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.)

Videos:

Caring Shepherds. (18 minutes) Produced by and available from the Risk Management Department of the General Council on Finance and Administration of The United Methodist Church. Created to help congregational leaders identify potential problems and develop policies to reduce the occurrence of sexual abuse and misconduct.

Ask Before You Hug: Sexual Harassment in the Church. (31 minutes) Produced by United Methodist Communications. Available from EcuFilm (800/251-4091). Helps clarify what constitutes sexual harassment.

Hear Their Cries. (48-minutes) Available from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Provides definitions, signs for recognizing abuse, and examples of how to respond.

Bless Our Children: Preventing Sexual Abuse. (40 minutes) Available from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Story of one congregation's efforts to provide abuse prevention information for their children.