

First Baptist Church  
Greenville, South Carolina

**Protecting our Children  
Reducing the Risk of Child  
Sexual Abuse in our Church**

A Comprehensive Program

Volunteer/Employee Information Booklet

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## The Program Includes...

### **Screening**

- Employee Forms
- Volunteer Enlistment: Application, Interview, SLED background check
- Volunteer Covenant for Sexual Responsibility Screening Form

### **Education**

- Information Booklet
- Video and Training Sessions

### **Supervision**

- Team Approach—Risk Assessment
- 6 Month Rule/Exception
- Open Doors/Windows on doors
- Church Nursery ID Procedure
- Overnight rule

### **Reporting and Response**

- Specific plan in place
- Quick response time
- Protection of confidentiality and privacy
- Inform department head of any allegation
- Take any allegation seriously

# The Need For A Prevention Program

## The Problem Is Real

*Ed begins attending First Church. After a few weeks, he volunteers to work with the youth group. Church staff members do not know Ed, but they are delighted to have another worker. He is put to work immediately. The youth group has an overnight activity a few months later. Following the activity, two minors report that they were sexually molested by Ed. The parents of one of the minors contact an attorney, and a \$3 million lawsuit is brought against Ed, the church, and the church board. The parents claim that the church (and the church board) acted negligently by not doing any background investigation before using Ed as a volunteer worker.*

This tragic story represents an increasing problem facing churches today. Hundreds of churches have been sued as a result of the sexual molestation of minors by church workers. Unfortunately, some church leaders ignore this concern and fail to implement a child sexual abuse prevention program. They think, “no child has ever been molested in our church, so why worry?” This attitude of denial is a very dangerous response. The lack of a prevention program leaves the children, the church, and church leaders vulnerable. Our church goal is to provide a sacred and secure environment for all our children.

## It Could Happen In Any Church

- Incidents of molestation could occur in any church – including ours.
- Asking sensitive questions of those who are giving their time and talent can be seen as distasteful by church leaders.
- No one wants to offend potential workers, especially longtime church members with a history of good service.
- Our goal is to be realistic about this concern and to have a sacred and secure environment.

## Impact

A single incident of child molestation can devastate a church and divide the congregation.

- Members become outraged and bewildered.
- Parents question whether their own children have been victimized.
- The viability of the church’s youth and children’s programs is jeopardized.
- Church leaders face blame and guilt for allowing the incident to happen.
- Resulting in massive media attention, sometimes on a national scale.
- Community residents begin to associate the church with the incident of molestation.
- **But far more tragic is the emotional trauma to the victim and the victim’s family, and the enormous potential legal liability the church faces.**

## **The Good News!**

- Church leaders can take relatively simple, yet effective, steps that significantly reduce the likelihood of child sexual abuse in the church.
- We are joining thousands of other congregations that are taking positive steps to make their churches sacred and secure places for children.

**Remember that our sacred responsibility is to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who are entrusted to our church.**

# Understanding Child Sexual Abuse

## What Is Child Sexual Abuse?

The precise legal definition of child sexual abuse or molestation varies from state to state, but in general includes any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a minor is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator. In a more common sense, child sexual abuse is:

*“Any sexual activity with a child – whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent or other child, provided the child is four years older than the victim.”* (National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, 1992)

1. Child sexual abuse may be violent or nonviolent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child’s vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the actions.
2. Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially and developmentally ready.
3. Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.
4. Types of abuse that involve touching include:
  - Inappropriate kissing
  - Fondling
  - Oral, genital, and anal penetration
  - Intercourse
  - Forcible rape
5. Types of sexual abuse that do not involve touching include:
  - Verbal comments
  - Pornographic videos
  - Obscene phone calls
  - Exhibitionism
  - Allowing children to witness sexual activity
6. Statistics
  - The full extent of child sexual abuse in our country is not known.
  - Current conservative estimates suggest that from 500,000 to over 1,500,000 children are sexually abused each year. The possibility that the number is higher is likely because the greatest percentage of these cases go unreported. The latest national retrospective study on the prevalence of child sexual abuse found that 27 percent of adult women and 16 percent of men claimed to have experienced some form of child sexual victimization. Over 25 percent indicated this occurred before the age of nine. (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis and Smith, 1990).

Child sexual abuse occurs in all demographics, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious groups. Strangers count for less than 20 percent of the abusers. Estimates indicate that when a known

assailant commits the abuse, half of the time it is the father or stepfather, and the rest of the time it is a trusted adult who misuses his or her authority over children.

## **Definition of Sexual Misconduct**

Sexual misconduct has been identified as any “sexualized behavior” within a “ministerial relationship.” First Baptist Greenville strictly prohibits such misconduct.

1. A ministerial relationship exists between a person providing ministry and the recipients of that ministry.
  - a. Clergy, youth advisors, Sunday school or Bible School teachers, and musicians all provide ministry, whether volunteer or paid.
  - b. Recipients of the church’s ministry may be parishioners, counselees, students, employees and volunteers.
2. Sexualized behavior encompasses a broad spectrum or continuum of behavior including gestures and speech as well as physical contact. Sexualized behavior is not limited to sexual intercourse. Sexualized behaviors that might be acceptable in an intimate personal relationship are not acceptable within the context of a ministerial relationship.
3. It is unethical, wrong, inappropriate, or unacceptable behavior for any person engaged in the ministry of First Baptist Greenville (whether lay or ordained, employed or volunteer) to engage in sexualized behavior with anyone with whom there exists a ministerial relationship.
4. Every reasonable effort will be made to bring any misconduct to an end.
5. Every report of misconduct will be taken seriously.
6. All person involved in an allegation will receive compassion, sensitivity, and concern.
7. In so far as possible, the identity of all persons involved in a report of misconduct will be maintained in confidence. Information related to the report will be shared as required by the policy and procedures in order to investigate and decide an appropriate response to the reported misconduct.
8. The right of all people to obtain justice in an open and fair hearing will be respected.

## **The Effects of Child Sexual Abuse**

*“The personal violation of child sexual abuse causes the victim to experience many losses...including loss of childhood memories, loss of healthy social contact, loss of the opportunity to learn, loss of bodily integrity, loss of identity and self-esteem, loss of trust, loss of sexual maturity, and loss of self-determination. All of these personal violations mean that victims of child sexual abuse lose the child’s right to a normal childhood. In adulthood it may also mean the loss of the capacity to appreciate sexual intimacy as nurturing, holy, and loving.”* (The Report on the Winter Commission, 1990, Vol. 1, p. 118)

**Child sexual abuse robs children of their childhood and can potentially scar its young victims for life.** Too often in the past, the effects of abuse were minimized or dismissed. Children were viewed as being resilient. Recent research has shown that children can suffer significant pain from even a single abusive incident. Church members must be aware of the pain and long term suffering that can accompany such abuse. Abused children can display a wide range of negative

symptoms in the aftermath of abuse. Abuse can result in abnormal fears, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), aggressive behavior, sexual “acting out,” depression, diffused sexual identity, and poor self-esteem (Kendall-Tackett, Williams, and Finkelhor, 1991). The incidence of sexually transmitted disease is also a possible outcome.

**The degree of damage depends upon several factors including the intensity, duration, and frequency of the abuse.** In addition, the *relationship* of the perpetrator to the child matters. If the abuser is a known and trusted authority figure in the child’s life, the degree of impact increases dramatically.

**An additional burden for the parishioner or client is a sense of being betrayed by God and the Church.** This betrayal by one’s pastor represents a major obstacle to the parishioner of client’s personal faith. The damage to one’s spiritual life done by this experience is often profound and long term (Marie Marshall Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*, p. 107).

**Consequences of child sexual abuse can plague victims into adulthood.** Outcome studies of adult supervisors of child sexual abuse suggest the following affects: sexual dysfunction, eating disorders, substance abuse, promiscuity, disassociation from emotions, and possible perpetration of sexual abuse on others (Geffner, 1992). **When church leaders, pastors, and respected congregational workers perpetrate the abuse, lifelong religious confusion and deep feelings of enmity toward God and the Church can occur.**

## **The Profile of a Child Molester**

*Bob sat dejectedly before the church board. His broad shoulders slumped as he tearfully retold his story. Bob has been sexually molesting his thirteen-year-old daughter for the last two years. This activity may have gone undetected except that Bob tried to abuse one of his daughter’s girlfriends while chaperoning a Sunday School activity. The young girl reported the incident to her parents and Bob was apprehended. The church leaders hearing this confession sat in disbelief. How could Bob, a successful businessman, husband, father of three children, and respected church worker commit such actions?*

Who is the typical child molester?

- Some church leaders assume that molesters are “strangers wearing trench coats” or “dirty old men.”
- These stereotypes not only are inaccurate, but they dangerously contribute to a false sense of security.
- Over eighty percent of the time, the abuser is someone known to the victim.
- Most abuse takes place within the context of an ongoing relationship.
- 20 percent of sex offenders begin their activity before the age of 18.
- Child abusers often are married and have children.
- If abuse occurs in your church, a respected member will most likely be the molester.

**Most of the time the abuser is someone known and trusted by the victim.**

## Symptoms of Molestation

Church workers and staff should be alert to the physical signs of abuse and molestation, as well as to behavioral and verbal signs that a victim may exhibit. Some of the more common signs are summarized below (Sloan, 1983).

*Physical signs may include:*

- lacerations and bruises
- nightmares
- irritation, pain, or injury to genital area
- difficulty with urination
- discomfort when sitting
- torn or bloody underclothing
- venereal disease

*Behavioral signs may include:*

- anxiety when approaching church or nursery area
- nervous or hostile behavior towards adults
- sexual self-consciousness
- “acting out” of sexual behavior
- withdrawal from church activities and friends

*Verbal signs may include the following statements:*

- I don't like [a church worker]
- [A church worker] does things to me when we're alone
- I don't like to be alone with [a church worker]
- [A church worker] fooled around with me

## Statement of Policy

### A. Prohibition of Sexual Exploitation and Harassment

**First Baptist Greenville is committed to creating and maintaining a sacred worship and work community in which members, friends, staff, and volunteers can worship and work together in a secure atmosphere free of all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or intimidation.** Specifically, all persons associated with First Baptist Greenville should be aware that church policy strictly prohibits sexual exploitation and harassment. To implement this policy the church has adopted screening, educational, supervisory, and reporting response procedures. It is the intention and responsibility of the church to take whatever action may be needed to prevent and correct behavior which is contrary to this policy and if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy which may include legal action as stated in #7 of the Screening Application.

## B. Ministerial Conduct

**Sexual harassment or sexual exploitation of parishioner(s) or other individual(s) by anyone engaged in the ministry of First Baptist Church is unethical and unprofessional behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.** All persons engaged in the ministry of First Baptist Greenville (including elected or appointed leaders, employees, volunteers, and authorized ministers) are responsible for knowing the possible impact of their words and actions in ministering to the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of persons who come to them for help or over whom they have any kind of authority.

**It is the policy of First Baptist Greenville to encourage its leaders, authorized ministers, employees, and volunteers to nurture safety within ministerial relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.** Because ministers (including elected or appointed leaders, employees, volunteers, and authorized ministers) often deal with individuals who are emotionally and psychologically fragile or otherwise personally vulnerable, it is imperative that those who engage in the ministry of this church maintain their own psychological, emotional, and spiritual health and that they have adequate preparation and education for helping those individuals they seek to serve in ministry. **Persons who work with young people under 18 will be required to attend a training session, receive a written copy of this booklet, complete the Screening Form, and sign the Covenant for Sexual Responsibility.**

## C. Protection Policy for Minors

**It is the policy of the church to provide adequate supervision for all activities involving minors. All employees or volunteers who work with minors must complete and submit a Screening Form and Covenant for Sexual Responsibility.** First Baptist Greenville is committed to creating a reasonably safe and healthy environment in which minors can learn about and experience God's love. In order to ensure this, we expect that all people applying to be volunteers who work with minors will have been members for at least six (6) months (exceptions may be made by authorized church representatives.)

## Definitions

**Minister:** a person engaged by the church to carry out its ministry. Minister includes elected or appointed leaders of the church, employees, and volunteers.

**Ministerial relationship:** the relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the church and the one being served by that ministry.

**Sexual exploitation:** repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes; includes behavior directed at another person's sexuality or sexual orientation with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- ◆ Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term, condition or circumstance of instruction, employment, or participation in any church activity;
- ◆ Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for evaluation in making personnel or church-related decisions affecting an individual; or
- ◆ Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or participation in church activities or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or church environment.

Prohibited sexual harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones, particularly:

- Written contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes, e-mail, or invitations;
- Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits or sexual orientation, sexual propositions;
- Physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault, coercing sexual intercourse; and
- Visual contact, such as leering or staring at another's body, gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters, or magazines.

Sexual harassment also includes continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome – and using sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, salary, work, learning, or worship environment of another. It is impermissible to suggest, threaten, or imply that failure to accept a request for a date or sexual intimacy will affect a person's job prospects, church leadership, or comfortable participation in the life of the church. For example, it is forbidden either to imply or actually withhold support for an appointment, promotion, or change of assignment, to suggest that a poor performance report will be given because a person has declined a personal proposition; or to hint that benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties or shifts, recommendations or reclassifications, will be forthcoming in exchange for sexual favors.

### **Criminal Records Checks**

Criminal records checks will be conducted on all paid employees, and on any volunteer who will have access to children. The type of criminal records check will be determined by the church. It may be a local, state, or federal search. The church may also access state or federal sex offender registries in performing a background check on an employee or volunteer. **All workers, paid or volunteer, must give written consent to such searches as a condition to being approved to work with youth or children.**

### **Reporting Procedures For Church Workers**

Developing and following a reporting procedure is a critical component in a sexual abuse prevention program. Child sexual abuse thrives when it goes unnoticed or unreported. Often, an

abusive situation continues because of someone's failure to report it. All church workers need to know what constitutes an occasion for reporting, the reporting channels they should use, and their obligations to make a report.

## **Reporting Obligations**

An effective reporting procedure enhances the effort to protect children. Ordinarily, child molesters will not remain in a church where workers are trained to identify symptoms of child abuse and are encouraged to report suspicious behavior. Child abusers thrive on secrecy and are more likely to commit criminal acts in organizations where they go unnoticed.

## **What to do if abuse is suspected or a report needs to be made by an employee or volunteer...**

### **Mutual Accountability – A Church Obligation**

A sound reporting procedure promotes accountability among church workers. Questionable or inappropriate behavior often precedes acts of child molestation. Church workers should be trained to identify inappropriate behavior with children. Workers should be encouraged to warn each other when questionable behavior is displayed. Questionable behaviors should be reported to the proper individuals. Such a policy, if implemented with care and sensitivity, can help to avoid actual instances of abuse or molestation.

### **Personal Responsibility – A Moral Obligation**

Workers may not report a suspected incidence of child sexual abuse for a variety of reasons. Some may want to avoid embarrassing situations. Who wants to be a tattler? A fear of possible personal and legal recrimination may exist. Discrete and confidential reporting of suspected abuse is critical to abuse prevention. Church workers should understand that reporting reflects caring and is not a disloyalty.

### **Volunteer Responsibilities**

The report or accusation should be made to the appropriate department head. The department head will then decide the appropriate response and enlist the help of appropriate legal and social authorities. Never interview the victim on your own. This can lead to contaminated testimony.

### ***Staff Responsibilities once a report has been made***

1. Do not confront the accused until the safety of the child or youth member is secured. Never interview the victim. Leave that to proper authorities as noted under state compliance.
2. Enlist the help of supervisors immediately. Report the incident immediately to the church insurance company, attorney and any others who need to be included in the follow-up. Do not try to handle the situation without professional outside assistance.
3. Document all efforts at handling the incident.

4. Notify the parents.
5. Contact the proper civil authorities following the guidance of the insurance company and attorney. Do not attempt an in-depth investigation. This should be left to professionals who are trained and familiar with these kinds of situations.
6. Do not prejudge the situation. Take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. The care and safety of the victim are the first priority.
7. Treat the accused with dignity and support. If the accused is a church worker, that person should be relieved of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the person is a paid employee, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
8. The church will designate a person(s) to be the spokesperson(s) for the church to the media. That person, and that person only, will issue the following public statement to the press and will convey news to the congregation. Every precaution will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.

### ***Reporting and follow-up principles***

- ◆ If a report or an allegation is made, handle the allegations seriously.
- ◆ Handle the situation in a forthright manner.
- ◆ Respect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, protecting the victim, accused and accuser from as much public scrutiny as possible.
- ◆ Involve legal authorities as necessary.
- ◆ Cooperate fully with all civil authorities in consultation with the church's attorney.
- ◆ Adequate care must be shown for all involved.
- ◆ The victim should not be held responsible in any way.

### **State Compliance for employees**

In South Carolina certain persons are required by law to report to the County Department of Social Services or to law enforcement agency in the county where the child is found when in the person's professional capacity the person has received information that a child has been abused or neglected. 20-7-510 (A) of the South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976 as amended provides as follows: (A) A physician, nurse, dentist, optometrist, medical examiner, or coroner, or an employee of a county medical examiner's or coroner's office, or any other medical, emergency medical services, mental health, or allied health professional, member of the clergy including a Christian Science Practitioner or religious healer, school teacher, counselor, principal, social or public assistance worker, substance treatment staff, or childcare worker in a childcare center or foster care facility, police or law enforcement office, undertaker, funeral home director or employee of a funeral home, persons responsible for processing films, computer technician, or a judge must report in accordance with this section when in the person's professional capacity the person has received information which gives the person reason to believe that a child has been or may be abused or neglected as defined in Section 20-7-490. If you are one of such persons, you have reporting obligation separate and apart from your duties to report set forth in this booklet. As a church worker/volunteer, you must report any abuse or suspected abuse as outlined in this booklet **on page 13 under Volunteer Responsibilities.**

If you are a member of the clergy, you may be exempt from reporting “when information is received from the alleged perpetrator of the abuse and neglect during a communication that is protected by the clergy and penitent privilege as defined in Section 19-11-90.” (20-7-550).

Section 19-11-90 limits the priest-penitent exemption to “regular or duly ordained minister, priest or rabbi.” All members of the clergy are advised to consult with legal counsel as to whether you must report or whether you are exempt because of the privilege.

## **Draft Press Release**

America’s children are our most precious resource. First Baptist Greenville is committed to the protection of children from physical and sexual abuse. The church has instituted policies and safeguards designed to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse. It is the policy of First Baptist Greenville that physical abuse and sexual abuse of children are strictly prohibited. All workers with children are carefully screened before they are allowed to work with children. All workers are required to attend training sessions where they learn to recognize this problem and report any suspected violations to the church.

The church is concerned about the reported incident and takes this matter seriously. The proper authorities have been notified and the church is cooperating with them. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family. The church worker who is alleged to have committed this act has been relieved of all church responsibilities until this investigation has been completed. The church will take every precaution to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all concerned while the investigative process is ongoing.

Due to the sensitive nature of this matter, the church has no further comment at this time. We will have further statements as the investigation progresses.

## **Supervising Church Workers**

One of the most critical aspects of reducing the risk of child sexual abuse is the supervision of church workers.

### **General versus Specific Supervision**

Not all activities bear the same level of risk. As a result, the level of supervision should correspond to the level of risk. The concepts of general supervision and specific supervision can be applied to this distinction.

General supervision is appropriate for low risk activities where the potential for a serious accident or injury is low. The primary focus of general supervision is on the group at large, rather than on specific individuals or actions. Common examples of general supervision at a church include teaching a Sunday School class, monitoring youth during a meal, or supervising a volleyball game.

As risk increases, however, the supervision should become more specific. Specific supervision is more direct and focused, and requires higher levels of understanding, training, skill, observation, and feedback. Supervisors must understand the risks that are present, know how to reduce those risks, engage in direct and focused observation, and provide necessary feedback or intervention to avoid accidents or injuries. For example, while general supervision is appropriate for monitoring children eating a meal, specific supervision is needed for children cooking a meal. As supervision moves from general to specific, more direction is needed. This leads us to the first risk principle:

**Principle 1: As risk increased, supervision should also increase. (Risk Factor: Assessment)**

The level of supervision should be tied to the level of risk. It is necessary to have some means to assess risk with respect to specific activities and programs. For example, in general we can say that a church “lock-in” represents a higher level of risk than a Sunday School class. But what is it that makes the lock-in a higher risk activity. We can answer that question by analyzing key risk factors. We need to know the level of risk so we can make informed judgments regarding the needed level of supervision.

One assessment approach is to examine the following three risk factors: (1) isolation, (2) accountability, and (3) power and control. Each factor has an associated risk principle that can be used to provide an underlying sense of direction regarding supervision.

The interaction of the three risk factors of isolation, accountability, and power and control establishes a risk environment. Risk environments are dynamic. A change in any one of the risk factors alters the environment. The best risk environment is one with low isolation, high accountability, and a balance of power and control. Molesters, on the other hand, desire to increase isolation, lower accountability, and to maintain power and control over their victims.

By analyzing these three risk factors, a risk profile begins to emerge. Then, based upon the level of risk, adjustments can be made to the nature of the supervision, if necessary, to lower risk.

**Key point:** *General supervision is appropriate for low risk activities. As the risk increases, the supervision should become more specific. The task, therefore, is to establish a means to assess risk, and then based on that assessment to adjust the level of supervision to correspond to the level of risk.*

**Principle 2: Risk increases as isolation increases. (Risk Factor: Isolation)**

Most, but not all, sexual abuse occurs in isolated settings. As a general principle, risk increases as isolation increases. Four factors that affect isolation are (1) the number of people present, (2) the time of the activity, (3) the location of the activity, and (4) the physical arrangements. These factors impact the risk environment. Let’s now apply this principle to the following examples.

**Example.** *A fourth grade Sunday School class meets from 9:30-10:30 AM each Sunday in the main education building. Other classrooms are located on either side of the room, and there is plenty of activity going on in the building at that time of*

*day. Someone always drops by to collect the class offering. The door, which has a large window, is left open while the class meets. The class has two adult teachers.*

In this example, isolation is low. The activity occurs in a group setting at a time when other activities and people are present in the building. The class has two adult supervisors. Other adults may enter the classroom unannounced at any time. Since the door is open people passing by can glance in. The number of people present, time, location, and physical arrangement of the event create a low risk environment. In such a setting, the risk of abuse is low and as a result a general level of supervision is appropriate.

What happens to the level of risk if the door is closed, there is only one teacher, and there is no window in the door?

What happens as if when as the class is over two children wander through the building and rather than go to worship they go back to the empty classroom and shut the door?

In both situations, isolation increases and as a result risk increases.

***Example.** The teachers invite the class to return to their classroom on Sunday afternoon at 3 PM for a party. No other activities are present on church property at that time.*

In this example, the children meet in the same location in the afternoon as they did in the morning. The change in time, however, alters the number of people present in the building, and as a result the risk environment has changed. Isolation has increased, so risk has also increased. As risk increases, the supervision should also increase meaning that it should become more accountable. That means having at least two adults present, as well as having approval to sponsor the activity. Let's look at a slight variation of this example.

What if the party occurs at a local restaurant rather than at the church? Other risks are present including transportation to and from the restaurant.

**Key point.** *Here is a general guideline that is useful in assessing isolation and responding to it in order to lower risk: treat any activity that is located off of church property, or any activity that is located on church property, but at a time or location that is isolated, as higher risk. Any higher risk activity should have two or more adults as supervisors.*

### **Principle 3: Risk increases as accountability decreases. (Risk Factor: Accountability)**

The second risk factor that should be evaluated is the nature of the accountability. The sexual abuse of children always occurs in settings without proper accountability. As a general principle, risk increases as accountability decreases. Notice the relationship between risk and accountability in each of the following examples.

#### ***Examples***

- *Fred, a college student and a volunteer worker with the church's high school youth group, announces he is available for transportation if any of the members need a ride to group activities. Anne, a seventeen-year-old high school senior asks Fred for a ride.*
- *Stan, the new youth pastor wants to meet with members of the youth group to get to know them better. He decides to pick up students after school and take them out to get some ice cream. However, church policy requires that he must obtain permission in advance for such meetings. The pastor decides that another youth supervisor must be present.*
- *Randy, an adult member of First Church, volunteers to pick up a 10-year-old boy on his way to church each week. The boy lives with his mother, who is delighted to have a "father figure" express an interest in her son.*

In the three examples above, only the middle one demonstrates the use of accountability when the pastor requires the presence of a second adult.

Accountability involves justifying one's actions. Since sexual molestation cannot be justified, the perpetrators of abuse avoid settings in which they must give an account of their behavior. That's why they seek isolated settings, act in secrecy, and attempt to maintain power and control over their victims.

In addition, workers with no prior intention to engage in misconduct, may nevertheless cross a boundary under certain circumstances. One purpose of accountability is to make sure that those circumstances do not occur.

Three factors that affect the accountability of supervisors in church programs involving children include: (1) the personal character and integrity of the adult worker, (2) the number of people present for the activity, and (3) the degree of openness and approval associated with the activity. Let's look at each factor.

1. *Personal character and integrity.* Clearly, a person's character and integrity affect risk, and that is why screening workers is a vital part of a prevention program. Parents assume that their children will be safe when they leave them in the care of another adult at church. Embedded in that assumption is that the adult is trustworthy and has the best interests of the child at heart.

2. *The number of people present.* The second factor in assessing accountability is to examine the number of people who are present for an activity. The general rule is the more adults the better. Accountability increases when two or more adults are present for activities that involve children and youth. Having multiple adults present decreases the risk of isolation, and helps to maintain a better balance of power and control. While the ideal situation is to always have two or more adults supervising children and youth, that is not always possible. From a policy standpoint, it

makes sense to have two or more adults present in higher risk settings. One adult can supervise **only** in group situations, and those activities should **only** occur in settings of low isolation. It is also a good idea to appoint someone to serve as a building monitor and inspect vacant rooms, buildings that are set apart, and private areas such as rest rooms. People are less likely to engage in inappropriate conduct if they think someone is watching.

3. *Degree of openness and approval.* Openness is also important for accountability to occur. Programs that involve children and youth should not be cloaked in secrecy. All church workers, paid or volunteer, must obtain advance approval before any activity can be sponsored in the name of the church or on church property.

Other factors such as lighting, windows, open doors, and the use of video surveillance equipment can enhance the level of openness and reduce secrecy of activities that occur on church property.

***Example.** A fourth grade Sunday School class has two adult teachers. The class meets at the home of one of the teachers on a Friday night from 7 PM to 9 PM to play volleyball. Both teachers are present, and parents are also invited to attend. The Christian Education Director has approved the activity. Both teachers went through a screening program before they began working with children.*

The first point to notice is the event is being held off of church property, which makes it higher risk. This triggers the need for two or more adults. Parents are also invited to attend, which further lowers isolation and increases accountability. Risk decreases further since both teachers have gone through a screening process. In this example, the risk of abuse is relatively low, yet other factors can contribute to a dynamic risk environment, which can change at any moment. Imagine, for example, that one child gets another child alone in a bedroom while everyone else plays outside. Abuse could occur in that isolated setting. To avoid such a scenario, boundaries should be established concerning the use of the house. Furthermore, those responsible for supervision should be aware of such concerns and take appropriate actions to monitor the space and to maintain an open environment that facilitates low risk.

Variations on this example show how easily the risk environment can be altered. First, suppose parents are not invited. Second, only one teacher is present. Third, no one on the church staff knows about the event. Fourth, no screening occurred and the teacher has a criminal record that no one knows about. Fifth, the time is extended to 11 PM. Sixth, only boys are invited and it includes a sleep over. Each factor increases risk as isolation is increased and accountability is decreased.

**Key point:** *Accountability involves justifying one's actions. Three factors affect accountability. 1) The personal character and integrity on the adult worker: a screening process requires a formalized plan. 2) The number of people present: having multiple adults present for any activity decreases the risk of isolation and helps maintain a balance of power and control. 3) The degree of openness and approval associated with an activity: Church leaders should obtain advance approval before any activity can be sponsored in the name of the church or on the church property.*

**Principle 4: Risk increases when there is an imbalance of power, authority, influence, and control between a potential abuser and a potential victim. (Risk Factor: Power and control)**

One reason that children are so vulnerable to sexual predators is the imbalance of power related to age, size, strength, and also control and authority. Most child victims of sexual abuse know and trust their abuser. They may also fear the person. Once abuse occurs, perpetrators will use their power, authority, and influence to promote silence.

Control can be exerted in many ways, both physically and psychologically. Some abusers use seduction techniques to gain the trust and control of a child. They may offer cash, gifts, trips, fun experiences, and shower the child with attention and favors. They may also use blackmail, threats, physical force and intimidation. In addition, predatory abusers often select their victims carefully to increase their likelihood of success. Children who are targets for abuse are no match for such predators.

What makes the problem unusually difficult in church settings is that the abuser is often a respected member of the congregation. In addition to being able to exert the types of power and control just discussed, such individuals will also use their spiritual authority as a means of power and control. It creates an even more problematic situation to uncover since other church leaders and the parents of the children trust and respect the abuser.

Abuse is less likely to occur when a balance of power exists. That balance of power does not exist between a child and an adult abuser. Rather, the balance of power must come from other adults, as well as from policies that are designed to maintain a low risk environment.

Research indicated that between 10-20 percent of church-related abuse cases involve another child as the perpetrator of the abuse. In part, these cases occur because of an imbalance of power, which is typically age-related. It is less likely, for example, that a 9-year-old will molest another 9-year-old, than a 15-year-old will molest a 7-year-old. When sexual activity occurs between children, and there is an age separation of 5 years or more, it is generally considered sexual abuse. As the following example illustrate, this has implications on how churches pair children.

***Example.** During Vacation Bible School, a 16-year-old boy serves as an assistant teacher. The adult teacher asks the teenage assistant to take a 5-year-old boy to the rest room.*

This example reflects a lack of balance regarding power and control. As a result risk has increased. Numerous options exist to lower the risk of sexual abuse. The teacher could have two 5-year-olds go to the rest room together, or take a rest room break for the entire class. Both of these options maintain a better balance of power and control. Parents could be asked to take their children to the rest room before arriving at class. A rest room monitor could be appointed who has gone through a proper screening program. The goal of each option is to maintain a better balance of power and to enhance accountability.

***Example.** First Church sponsors a camping trip for middle school and high school students. A 17-year-old boy and a 12-year-old boy share a tent.*

This example reflects an imbalance of power due to the age difference between the two boys. It would be better to pair campers together who are about the same age. Using the risk factor of power and control, risk increases in both examples because the age difference between the children is 5 years or more. That raises a red flag.

**Key Point:** *Children are vulnerable to sexual predators due to an imbalance of power related to age, size, strength, control and authority. Risk increases when there is an age separation of five years or more. Abuse is less likely to occur when a balance of power exists. Adequate policies and an adequate number of adults lower the risk.*

## **Church Activities**

By their very nature some activities represent a higher level of risk for sexual molestation than do others. These activities often increase isolation and lower accountability:

- Any activity that occurs in a home
- Any overnight activity including church lock-ins, camping trips, or staying in hotel rooms
- Any activity that involves changing clothes or becoming undressed such as in locker rooms or dressing rooms
- Any activity that involves groups of children with age differences of 5 years or more
- Any activity that occurs in a natural, isolated environment such as a building that is set off by itself, or a park that has secluded areas

## **Establishing a Risk Profile of Church Activities**

Establishing a risk profile of church activities helps to determine the nature and level of supervision that should occur to lower the risk of sexual abuse. The three risk factors of isolation, accountability, and power and control must be considered in the profile. The following questions must be addressed as activities are assessed for risk:

- Who is present?
- Where do the meetings occur?
- At what time do they occur?
- How often do they occur?
- How long do they last and under what circumstances?
- Who else is informed?
- Has permission been obtained in advance and from whom?
- Has the youth pastor been screened, and if so, what type of screening?
- What are the age differences and levels of maturity of each person?

Use the following evaluation checklist with church activities to assess risk levels and to identify steps to lower risks.

### ***Risk Evaluation Checklist***

#### **Ways to decrease isolation and lower risk**

1. Increase the number of people present
  - a. Key question: *Who will be present for this activity?*
  - b. Action step to lower risk: *Increase the number of people present to lower isolation and increase accountability.*
2. Examine the time and location of each activity.
  - a. Key question: *Does this activity occur at a time or location that causes it to be isolated?*
  - b. Action step to lower risk: *Change time or location so that isolation decreases, or increase level of accountability.*
3. Monitor and secure unoccupied space.
  - a. Key question: *Do we currently secure and properly monitor our facilities to prevent unauthorized use?*
  - b. Action steps to lower risk: *Appoint a monitor to check buildings and rest rooms that should be unoccupied while other activities occur on church property. Instruct teachers to make sure that the rooms are left unoccupied at the end of class. Have a designated person to lock doors and secure specific rooms and buildings at the end of their use.*
4. Control access to church property.
  - a. Key question: *Do we maintain control of church keys, and have a policy in place on who can use church facilities, and under what circumstances?*
  - b. Action steps to lower risk: *Develop a system to control use of church keys. If necessary have locks re-keyed. Develop a policy that governs the time and location of activities in coordination with proper accountability (see below).*
5. Require advanced approval of all church activities.
  - a. Key question: *Do we require individuals to obtain advanced permission before sponsoring an activity in the name of the church, or that appears to be a church-related function?*
  - b. Action step to lower risk: *Require individuals and groups to obtain advance permission from an authorized person before sponsoring activities that are in any way associated with the church.*

#### **Ways to increase accountability and lower risk**

6. Screen all individuals who work with children.
  - a. Key question: *Have workers been screened for the level of their responsibilities? Individuals who have frequent and unsupervised access to children require more thorough screening than those who have infrequent contact in group settings.*
  - b. Action step to lower risk: *Screen workers for their level of responsibility to determine that they have been accountable in the past.*
7. Increase the number of adult workers.
  - a. Key question: *Does a worker have unsupervised access to a child or extended unsupervised access to a group of children?*
  - b. Action steps to lower risk: *Have two or more unrelated workers present.*

8. Randomly observe activities.
  - a. Key question: *Are activities open or closed to public observation?*
  - b. Action steps to lower risk: *Conduct frequent random observation of activities. For example, appoint an usher to monitor activities throughout the building. Use video equipment to monitor activities. Install windows in doors. Use “Dutch-doors.”*
  
9. Provide training and supervision.
  - a. Key question: *Do workers know what is expected of them regarding appropriate and inappropriate behavior? Do they understand and abide by church policies both on and off of church property?*
  - b. Action step to lower risk: *Train each worker with respect to church policies and procedures.*

### **Ways to maintain a balance of power**

10. Take into account age, maturity, and influence when pairing up children.
  - a. Key question: *Do higher risk situations currently exist that promote an imbalance of power among children?*
  - b. Action step to lower risk: *Instruct supervisors to maintain a balance of power as much as possible in the pairing of children for any overnight activity, going to the rest room, or any other activity in which they may be alone for a period of time.*

The answers to these questions enable risk assessment. By analyzing these risk factors, a risk profile will emerge. Then, church leaders and workers must weigh the benefits of the activity against the level of risk. If the risk is too high, the program must be modified to lower risk. **Parents expect that the church has taken every precaution to fulfill its goal of providing a sacred, safe and secure environment for all the children entrusted to us.**

**Key Point:** *The risk factors and principles discussed here provide a basis for supervising activities involving children to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse. Churches should train workers to understand these principles and to apply them as they plan and supervise activities.*

### **Summary**

In summary, the combination of high isolation, low accountability, and an improper balance of power and authority, cause risk to increase. The goal of supervision should be to lower isolation, increase accountability, maintain a proper balance of power and authority, and provide appropriate levels of observation, control, and feedback concerning higher risk activities. As we noted at the offset, principles can provide an underlying sense of direction so that we can better understand and manage risks. The four principles discussed in this chapter are:

- Principle 1. As risks increases, supervision should increase.
- Principle 2. Risk increases as isolation increases.
- Principle 3. Risk increases as accountability decreases.
- Principle 4. Risk increases when there is an imbalance of power, authority, influence, and control between a potential abuser and a potential victim.

**APPENDIX and RESOURCES FOR COPYING**

## Symptoms of Molestation

Church workers and staff should be alert to the physical signs of abuse and molestation, as well as to behavioral and verbal signs that a victim may exhibit. Some of the more common signs are summarized below (Sloan, 1983).

*Physical signs may include:*

- lacerations and bruises
- nightmares
- irritation, pain, or injury to genital area
- difficulty with urination
- discomfort when sitting
- torn or bloody underclothing
- venereal disease

*Behavioral signs may include:*

- anxiety when approaching church or nursery area
- nervous or hostile behavior towards adults
- sexual self-consciousness
- “acting out” of sexual behavior
- withdrawal from church activities and friends

*Verbal signs may include the following statements:*

- I don't like [a church worker]
- [A church worker] does things to me when we're alone
- I don't like to be alone with [a church worker]
- [A church worker] fooled around with me

**Draft**  
**Press Release**

America's children are our most precious resource. First Baptist Greenville is committed to the protection of children from physical and sexual abuse. The church has instituted policies and safeguards designed to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse. It is the policy of First Baptist Greenville that physical abuse and sexual abuse of children are strictly prohibited. All workers with children are carefully screened before they are allowed to work with children. All workers are required to attend training sessions where they learn to recognize this problem and report any suspected violations to the church.

The church is concerned about the reported incident and takes this matter seriously. The proper authorities have been notified and the church is cooperating with them. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family. The church worker who is alleged to have committed this act has been relieved of all church responsibilities until this investigation has been completed. The church will take every precaution to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all concerned while the investigative process is ongoing.

Due to the sensitive nature of this matter, the church has no further comment at this time. We will have further statements as the investigation progresses.

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