



SAFE CHURCH | Getting Started

Advent Christian General Conference | Dept. of Student & Family Ministries

AREAS TO CONSIDER

- **Background Checks**

Background checks are your first priority in regards to protecting the kids in your church from predators, as well as those who may have a poor record working with children. Predators tend to prey on trusting environments; churches being one of them. Also, they are very willing to be patient, so they can gain the trust of those involved with church leadership. This is why background checks on EVERYONE are absolutely vital, even if someone's been in the church for a significant amount of time.

- **Classroom Policies**

Having appropriate classroom policies in place is another way in which you can ensure that kids are not placed in unsafe situations, while simultaneously making sure to protect those involved with ministering to kids. The goal of creating classroom policies is not *just* to protect kids from predators, but also to protect them from unsafe situations and objects that may cross their paths without proper protection.

Some classroom policies to consider might include the following:

- ✓ Two or more adults will be required in a class with minors.
- ✓ If two or more adults *can't* be present, someone will be appointed to be responsible for periodic "security sweeps" of any wing of the church where children are gathered. These security sweeps will be logged in case any issues arise.
- ✓ Doors with windows must be installed on all classroom doors. If doors with windows cannot be installed, then classroom doors must be left open at all times.
- ✓ Kids may not leave a classroom or gathering place, other than to go to the bathroom, unless they are supervised by an adult.
- ✓ A list of rules regarding safety and behavior will be provided to all teachers, parents, and kids, and will be displayed in each classroom.
- ✓ First aid kits should be made available in each classroom.
- ✓ Check-in and check-out procedures must be implemented, so that kids do not come and go from a class or gathering without being accounted for.
- ✓ Additionally nursery policies and procedures geared at some of the specific considerations related to the care of

infants should be considered. (A separate “getting started” guide for nursery policies is available through ACGC.)

- **Vehicle Use Policies**

Just as important as classroom policies, policies for those using the church vehicles, and for those using their own vehicles to transport minors as part of a church function, are equally as important. There are a variety of unsafe situations that can arise regarding kids on a trip. Additionally, providing an appropriate set of vehicle use policies and procedures can help protect the church from litigation if an accident occurs.

Some vehicle use policies to consider might include:

- ✓ A list of driver safety and vehicle inspection procedures that anyone driving on behalf of the church must agree to adhere to.
- ✓ A vehicle safety checklist that will be and filled out each time a church owned vehicle is used.
- ✓ Two or more adults being present when minors are being transported in church owned vehicles.
- ✓ A first aid kit mounted somewhere visible and accessible in all church vehicles.
- ✓ A log kept of all church vehicle use, which will include what the vehicle was used for and what responsible parties used the vehicle.

- **Release and Health Forms**

Having the proper forms in place is extremely important for protecting the church and those involved with the care of minors in your church. Having resource forms in place is vital if you are going to be transporting kids in church vehicles *or* if you are going to be caring for kids for an extended period of time (beyond regular church activities). Additionally, health forms that outline such things as: medical conditions, allergies, and insurance information, are a vital part of caring for the kids God has entrusted to you. Armed with such knowledge, you can avoid exposing kids to food or other items that may be hazardous to them. Additionally, if something does happen, a document which includes insurance information may be important if any kid needs medical care.

- **Abuse Prevention Training**

Providing training for your volunteers regarding abuse prevention is an important way to keep the kids God has entrusted to you safe, as well as to help impact their safety in the home if it becomes necessary. Such training will not only help you adopt good procedures within the church, but will help your volunteers identify the signs of child abuse in all forms. There are several agencies that offer this type of training, including ACGC.

In addition to any formal training offered by an outside agency, you will want to ensure that, at minimum, there are at least a few individuals who understand the proper reporting procedures that are required of the church and its officials if child abuse is discovered.

- **Facility Safety**

Facility safety procedures are, perhaps, one of the most overlooked items when looking at church safety. There are a variety of potential hazards around many church facilities that go unnoticed by the average church member. Therefore, having policies and procedures in place regarding the facilities is of the utmost importance if a child is to be kept safe while in the church facility.

Some items to consider regarding facility safety might include:

- ✓ Ensuring that all construction projects on the church grounds are both closed-off and well-marked.
- ✓ Training all those involved with caring for minors in how to respond to potential emergency situations that could arise (i.e. fire, weather emergencies, a dangerous individual in or around the church facility, etc.).
- ✓ First aid and CPR training for some of the key church leaders; in case something *does* go wrong.
- ✓ Regular safety and maintenance checks of the entirety of the church facility and grounds to identify potential safety hazards.
- ✓ Locks placed on rooms that include any items that could be hazardous to children (i.e. ovens, ladders, chemicals, etc.).
- ✓ Periodic “security sweeps” whenever the church facility is in use.

- **Nursery Specific Policies**

In addition to these other policies, it is wise to consider specific policies related to the church’s nursery. There are many things to consider that are specific to managing church nursery safety that may not be necessary in keeping the rest of your church safe for children.

Some additional things to consider regarding the nursery might include:

- ✓ Infant specific hazards, such as sharp objects, chemicals, potential choking hazards.
- ✓ Additional cleanliness and sanitation due to the fact that infants often place items in their mouths.
- ✓ Policy for your volunteers regarding how to deal with babies that will not stop crying.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

- Present the need and some initial ideas to the church board or leadership team.
- Create a safety committee to research and develop some *SAFE CHURCH policies*.
- Examine any existing policies your church already has to gauge their adequacy.

- **Examine the policies** of other churches and organizations to help identify whether or not there is anything you've missed.
- **Ensure that your policies provide the *necessary protection*** for your church's kids AND volunteers.
- **Submit your policies** to the church board & congregation for implementation.
- **Implement your policies and provide training** to your church leaders and those volunteers working with kids.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- **Shepherd's Watch (Group Publishing)**

Shepherd's watch is a great resource provided by Group Publishing. They provide easy background check services for you and some great training resources and videos as you look to develop AND sell your church on the development of a child safety policy. Currently, ACGC, through our partnership with Shepherd's Watch, has been offered a waiver of the registration fee for all our churches that desire to use Shepherd's Watch through the use of the official ACGC discount code: ACCSWB

- **Protect My Ministry**

Protect my Ministry is another great resource which provides you with background check assistance, online training resources, and pre-designed policies and procedures. Additionally, they provide all kinds of great resources to help churches from getting lost in the development phase of all of these complex policies.

- **KidCheck**

Kid Check is a service that provides electronic child check-in services, so you can stay organized and fully aware of who you have care over. Also, they provide paging services, so you can easily page parents if there is any problem.

- **Ministry Safe**

MinistrySafe provides state-approved Sexual Abuse Awareness Training, Skillful Screening Training, sample policies and procedures, application forms, reference check forms, interview forms and other instructional documents. The MinistrySafe Control Panel allows you to administer and track your safety system, including training completion.

- **Safe Church**

Safe Church provides assistance regarding just about everything that's been discussed in this document and more. They provide a lot of great services, church safety assessments, and even provide certification for churches, identifying them as "SAFE CHURCHES."

- **Your Church's Insurance Company**

Most insurance companies that provide coverage to churches offer resources and assistance in how to develop stronger safety policies and procedures for your church. Many of them will provide you with sample release forms which you can adapt for your church's use as well. Some even provide background check services at a lower cost than many other agencies.

** It is likely that in the next couple of years, insurance companies will require many of these policies and procedures to be in place for the churches they cover. If you don't take care of things now. They may make you later.*