



Alabama Baptist Convention  
**State Board of Missions**

# Protecting Children and Youth from Sexual Misconduct in Your Church

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Employment and other laws are constantly evolving and nothing contained herein should be considered legal advice. The reader should consult the church's attorney before carrying out any of the suggestions or adopting any of the policies contained herein.

## **Introduction**

Protecting children at church involves two large areas of concern. The first is prevention which includes such things as having proper policies in place and worker screening. The second major area is proper supervision.

First, a few basic points about the problem itself:

- 1) There is no profile of a sexual predator, so we must observe behavior. We must supervise. A predator may be any age or socio-economic group, male or female. An offender may be an adult, a youth or another child.
- 2) Child molesters may be situational (opportunistic) with very few victims, or they may be predatory having many victims. The situational offenders rarely show up on background checks. Even the predators often do not show up on background checks, because they manipulate victims to not tell.
- 3) In addition to any physical marks or evidence, we must observe behavior in children. Watch for a change in behavior – an outgoing child becomes withdrawn; a quiet child becomes aggressive, etc.

## **Prevention**

When seeking a staff member (minister, director or coordinator), take the following steps:

- 1) Check references
  - a) Carefully check at least five references when considering a staff member. Check at least three not listed on the resume.
  - b) Excellent reference resources include directors of missions, former staff members that have worked with the candidate, and church and community leaders from a former church. Do not contact anyone in the current church unless the candidate permits you to do so.
- 2) Look for gaps in ministry service.
- 3) Conduct an interview.
  - a) Include the spouse in the interview.
  - b) During the interview, secure written permission for a criminal background check and a credit check.\*
  - c) Ask character questions.
    - i) Have you ever been charged with or convicted of a crime?
    - ii) During your ministry, has your moral life been above reproach?
- 4) Conduct the criminal background check and, if a paid employee, a credit check.

\*Sample available at [www.alsbom.org/safe](http://www.alsbom.org/safe) or 800-264-1225, ext.263

## **Sexual Misconduct Policy**

Every church should plan to do what is best for preschoolers, children and youth at church and in church-sponsored activities. These are recommended guidelines:

- 1) This Sexual Misconduct policy regarding working with preschoolers, children or youth also includes those requested by the church to drive vehicles transporting minors.
  - a) Only adult members of the church should be given leadership responsibilities with preschoolers, children and youth.
  - b) A Six-Month Rule applies to all. A person should not work with minors until one has been a member of the church at least six months. Most pedophiles do not want to wait that long. They want immediate access to children.
- 2) A screening procedure should be conducted for both hourly paid and volunteer workers. This screening should include an application\*, an interview and a child abuse/neglect report from DHR. A criminal background check should be required of paid workers and may be required for volunteers.

## **Supervision**

- 1) Follow church-approved security policies for preschool, children's and youth ministries.
- 2) Age-group ministers, division directors, hall monitors, greeters and/or program directors should be present or nearby. As they do their work, they should also observe teaching units (departments or classes).
- 3) Establish a Two-Adult Rule: Reasonable effort will be made to have two adult workers present or nearby with preschoolers, children and students during church activities. Reasonable effort will be made to assure that one adult is not left alone with one minor. A husband and wife working the same room will typically be considered as one adult for purposes of this policy.
- 4) Install view windows or open doors for every teaching unit (department or class).
- 5) Establish a security system (check in/check out) for preschoolers and younger children. Parents must bring their child to the room, sign in their child and receive a card, and when they return for that child present the card. This can be as simple as a card you make yourself or something you purchase. Some of the purchased types have a two-part carbonless form of which the parent keeps one part and the copy stays in the room.

## **Responding to a report of child abuse**

A person who observes or suspects abuse should follow these guidelines:

- 1) Report the incident immediately to your pastor, unless the pastor is implicated. A lay leader of the church such as the deacon chairman should be immediately involved.
- 2) Do not attempt to handle such a situation without professional outside assistance such as your director of missions or the Office of LeaderCare & Church Administration, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 263, at the State Board of Missions.
- 3) Contact the proper civil authorities following the guidance of your attorney and insurance company. In Alabama, when child abuse or neglect is observed or suspected, it must be reported to the county Department of Human Resources orally and then followed by a written report. Questions regarding the reporting process can be answered by your county DHR or by calling 334-242-9500. Do not attempt an in-depth investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases. Abuse must be reported. Members and ministers are mandatory reporters. The exception may be confidential communication with clergy (Alabama Rules of Evidence 505, Code of Alabama Section 26-14-3). If you are in doubt as

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to how this applies to you contact your attorney or the Center for the Study of Law and the Church, 1.800.888.7303.

The protection of our children is paramount. Therefore it is suggested the churches/ministers adopt a policy of reporting and follow it.

- 4) Notify parents of the victim.
- 5) Confrontation of the accused should not take place until the safety of the child or youth is secured.
- 6) Discussions of this matter should be limited to a small and appropriate group.
- 7) Do not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support helps prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. In some situations, churches have responded in a negative or non-supportive manner to the alleged victim. This can increase the anger and pain of the victim and the victim's family. Future reconciliation will be more difficult, and the possibility of damaging litigation increases.
- 8) Treat the accused with dignity and support. If the accused is a church worker, that person should be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the person is a church employee, there should be full compensation during the time of the initial investigation.
- 9) Use the text of a prepared statement to inform the congregation, and, if necessary, be made available to the news media. Be careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.
- 10) Document all your efforts at handling the incident.

\*Source for some guidelines, *Reducing the Risk II: Making Your Church Safe from Child Sexual Abuse*

## Resources

[www.reducingtherisk.com](http://www.reducingtherisk.com)  
[www.ago.state.al.us/church](http://www.ago.state.al.us/church)  
[www.churchvolunteercentral.com](http://www.churchvolunteercentral.com)  
[www.protectmyministry.com](http://www.protectmyministry.com)  
[www.bradley-personnel.com](http://www.bradley-personnel.com)  
[www.guideonecenter.com](http://www.guideonecenter.com)  
[www.churchmutual.com](http://www.churchmutual.com)  
[www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

## Other presentations and documents

Alabama's Mandatory Child Abuse Reporting Law

Alabama Act 2003-272 – This legislation added clergy to the list of mandatory reporters.

Alabama Rules of Evidence 505 – This rule provides privilege to confidential communication to clergy.

"The Reporting Process: What to expect from DHR," James Long, Alabama assistant attorney general

"ABI Resources to Combat Child Abuse & Neglect," Corporal Karl Youngblood, Alabama Bureau of Investigation

*Better Safe than Sued*, Jack Crabtree, Group Publishing: "Detecting Staff Misconduct", pp. 63-68. This resource relates specifically to youth and older children's ministry.

"Child Abuse Reporting & Clergy: On line Resource Guide," [www.ago.state.al.us/church](http://www.ago.state.al.us/church). The site includes "Child Protection First!", documents developed by attorney Tom Eden.

*Reducing the Risk II resource kit*: James Cobble, *Church Law and Tax Report*, [www.reducingtherisk.com](http://www.reducingtherisk.com)

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# Conducting a Criminal Background Check

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Why is it necessary to conduct a background check on your church workers, employed and volunteer? Simply answered, “What you don’t know can hurt you!” Certainly churches need to protect themselves from lawsuits (negligent hiring, negligent retention, negligent referral), but much more importantly churches must protect its members and guests, especially children and minors. The general assumption is that the church should know about previous behavior before hiring employees and enlisting volunteers. Background checks are an important tool for meeting this assumption. Churches are encouraged to conduct a background check before putting people – even volunteers – to work in sensitive areas, such as with preschoolers, children and youth. What should be done?

- 1) **Receive written permission from the worker granting authorization to conduct a background check.** A standard authorization form is available from the State Board of Missions’ Office of LeaderCare and Church Administration.
  
- 2) **Select a background reporting agency to run the check.** Listed below are several companies that provide such a service. Discuss with the selected company costs, coverage and application forms.
  - **Department of Human Resources:** A child abuse/neglect report though DHR is free. Contact your county DHR or the state at 334-242-1425.
  
  - **ScreenNow:** [www.screennow.com](http://www.screennow.com) or 1-800-853-2414
  
  - **Volunteer Central:** [www.churchvolunteercentral.com](http://www.churchvolunteercentral.com) or 1-800-267-9040
  
  - **Single Source Services:** [www.singlesourceservices.com](http://www.singlesourceservices.com) or 1-800-713-3412
  
  - **Employment Screening Services:** <http://www.es2.com/default.asp?ID=18> or 1-866-859-0143

Upon receiving the report, handle the information provided with extreme confidentiality. Only those requesting the background check should be allowed to see the information.

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# Authorization for a Background Check

I hereby authorize the \_\_\_\_\_  
(please print church name)

to conduct a background check(s) for employment purposes. I understand that this may include criminal, credit and/or motor vehicle checks.

Name:                      Last                                              First                                              Middle

Other names used (if appropriate: maiden name, prior married name, etc.)

Date of birth                                              Social Security Number (for employment purposes only)

Driver's license number                                              State

Address

City                                              State                                              Zip

I agree to sign any other authorization required by this church in order to perform a background check.

Signature                                              Date

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## Confidential Volunteer Application

This application is to be completed by all volunteers for any position involving the supervision or custody of minors in church facilities or on church-sponsored activities. It will help our church family provide a safe and secure environment for all boys and girls who participate in our ministries and use our facilities.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Present Address \_\_\_\_\_ SSN \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (Evening) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (Day) \_\_\_\_\_

On what date would you be available to begin? \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a current driver's license?  No  Yes State \_\_\_\_\_ Driver license # \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been convicted of or arrested for any offense involving a minor?  No  Yes

If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been convicted of or arrested for a felony?  No  Yes

If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

I have read the Child Protection First Policy.  Yes  No

Have you engaged in conduct that would fall within the definition of child sexual abuse?  Yes  No

**(If you prefer, you may decline to answer the following question, or you may discuss your answer in confidence with one of the ministers rather than answering on this form. Answering yes or leaving the question unanswered will not automatically disqualify you.)**

Were you a victim of abuse or molestation as a minor or as an adult?  Yes  No

Initial here \_\_\_\_\_ if you are declining to answer this question.

Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

### Church Activity

When did you make your profession of faith in Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

Church member where? \_\_\_\_\_

**List other churches (name and city) you have attended regularly and service with minors: (use back if necessary)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**List any gifts, callings, training, education or other factors that have prepared you for teaching minors: (use back if necessary)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**Personal References (Not relatives)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Nature of association \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Work phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
Length of time known \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Nature of association \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
Length of time known \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

**Applicant’s Statement and Agreement**

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by \_\_\_\_\_ Child Protection First! Policy and to refrain from unscriptural conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.

**I have carefully read \_\_\_\_\_ Child Protection First! Policy and this application and state that the information I have provided is true and correct.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Applicant Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**For Office Use Only**

Member attending six months    Yes    No    Personal interview satisfactory    Yes    No  
Application satisfactory    Yes    No    Former church record satisfactory    Yes    No  
Release satisfactory    Yes    No    Record check satisfactory    Yes    No  
Personal references satisfactory    Yes    No

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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