

Washington Avenue Bible Church

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

SAMPLE: to be adapted to your church

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Introduction

Washington Avenue Bible Church [hereafter called WABC] has a biblical mandate to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to all ages. Therefore, we have a unique ministry with children and young people. It is the intent of WABC to make certain that all of our workers are aware of the seriousness of child abuse, and that all are aware of the definition and description of child abuse.

Illegal and Immoral

Child abuse is against the law as well as a violation of human conscience and dignity. Every state in the United States of America has laws against the abuse of children. Moreover, because the identification of child abuse in every form is vital to its prevention and its treatment, each state has enacted mandated reporting statutes. Child abuse cases must be reported. Even when there is reasonable suspicion, meaning that is objectively reasonable for a person to entertain such a suspicion, based upon facts that are observed, a report must be made. This requirement is part of the penal code of most states.

Litigation for Negligence.

Within the last decade, many hundreds of churches and other religious organizations, such as mission societies and youth camps, have been sued for implication in child abuse and sexual molestation. In most of the cases the plaintiffs allege either or both of the following: (1) the organization was negligent in allowing the molester to work with minors, and (2) the organization was negligent in supervising the individual. To this it should be added that a religious or church organization may be liable for negligence for not making a diligent investigation when charges or rumors of child molestation are first made. A church may also be criminally liable under state statutes for failure to report instances of child abuse when there are reasonable grounds to believe that there has been child molestation.

Results of Negligence.

The results of negligence can be monumental in scope. Here are several: (1) the emotional and spiritual trauma to the victims, both immediate and long-range; (2) the devastating effects experienced by the church when parents, who trusted the leadership, become enraged and when the communities affected become irate and revengeful; and, in the case of individual Christians, the loss of personal testimony before both Christians and non-Christians; (3) the injury to or loss of important ministries to youth that have taken years to build; (4) the tremendous cost, using funds intended for vital ministries, to pay for litigation in courts of law because of legal claims arising from such instances; (5) the sad consequences of the abusers themselves, or failure to recognize the problem before serious dysfunctional activity occurs which previous recognition might have prevented their needing effective treatment and subsequent rehabilitation.

Definition of Child Abuse

“The physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation, negligent treatment, or maltreatment of a child under the age of 18, by a person who is responsible for the child’s welfare, under circumstances which indicate that the child’s health or welfare is harmed or threatened thereby.”

-Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act
Public Law 93-247 93 Congress, Senate 1191,1974

Description of Child Abuse

1. Physical
Major physical injury to a child includes damage, broken bones, internal injuries, poisoning, beatings, and burns. Minor physical injury to a child includes minor cuts, bruises, and welts.
2. Sexual
Sexual abuse includes rape, incest, indecent assault, intercourse with a child, pornography, inappropriate touching, suggestive remarks, prostitution, and adult disrobing in the presence of a child.
3. Emotional and Verbal Assault
Emotional and verbal assault includes constant belittling of a child, telling a child he/she is stupid, incompetent, or worthless, rejecting a child, habitually pushing a child away, confining a child in a restricted space, manipulating a child through repeated threats, using a child for economic gain, being overly critical, holding back love from a child, and blaming a child for difficulties experienced by the adult.
4. Neglect
neglect includes frequent lack of supervision, medical neglect, malnutrition, lack of provision for the child's needs, and chaotic home life.

Signs of Child Abuse

There are no specific signs or group of signs that will tell you a child has been abused. The signs listed below can also be observed in children who have not been abused; however, these signs are often seen in abused children. Children grow and develop at their own pace. When assessing these signs in a child, it is important to know what behaviors are out of the ordinary for that particular child.

Physical Signs

- Unexplained injury or pain, or changing explanation of an injury
- Injuries that are inconsistent with the explanation or with the child's development level
- Unusual or frequent bruises, welts, or burns
- Inadequate dress for the weather [either overdressed for warm weather or underdressed for cold weather]
- Poor hygiene
- Frequently dressed in dirty clothes
- Discomfort while walking or sitting
- Unusual discharge or odor around genitals
- Frequent urinary tract infections or genital rashes
- Diagnosis of a sexually transmitted disease
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Pregnancy

Behavioral Signs

- Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem
- Behavioral extremes [aggression, withdrawal]
- Behavioral regression to an earlier developmental level
- Excessive or inappropriate fears [sudden fear of a familiar person, place, or activity]
- Running away
- Academic and behavioral problems in school

- Truancy or avoidance of school
- Difficulty making or maintaining friendships
- Changing sleep or appetite patterns
- Inappropriate emotional responses and/or difficulty in expressing emotion
- Frequent masturbation
- Sexual knowledge beyond age expectations
- Acting out sexually on others
- Preoccupation with sex
- Assumptions of a parental role
- Self-abusive behavior such as pulling out hair, banging head, cutting or burning self.
-from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

WABC Procedures for Recruiting and Training Workers

1. Screening

Each potential worker will be screened in the following ways:

- a) Fill out **Form A** - *Christian Education Workers Intent Form*
- b) CE Team will check references - **Form B**
- c) Interview with two CE Team members (the primary ministry leader and one co-worker - both of these people will sign Form C [pink])

2. Training

Child protection training which explains WABC procedures will be provided for everyone working with minors at the church. Included in the training shall be information on:

- a) county and state laws
- b) description of child abuse
- c) written job responsibilities as well as locations where new worker is to be serving
- d) guidelines of expected behavior by WABC workers while working with youth or children
- e) occasions for reporting abuse:
 - i WABC worker is accused of abuse by a child
 - ii WABC worker is suspicious that a child is being abused outside of WABC
 - iii someone other than an authorized guardian wants to take the child away from a WABC event
- f) penalties for not reporting incidents of real or suspected abuse

3. Approval

Obtain forms or have process started before working in the church

Every worker must sign the Child Protection Training Form (Form C) indicating he/she has completed the necessary training. WABC will reserve the right to retrain as needed.

Guidelines for Acceptable Behavior

1. Respect a child's refusal of affection and take care not to make the child feel uncomfortable.
2. A friendly pat on the bottom or a bear hug can be misinterpreted by a child or an observer. A slap on the back or a hug around the shoulders is okay. A body-to-body embrace or affectionate kiss is taboo.
3. True expressions of affection contribute to a warm, healthy relationship. Do not stop touching a child; just remember to place reasonable limits on physical interaction.
4. When taking a child to the restroom, do not make him/her feel uncomfortable by being present.
5. Do not linger in any area where a child is bathing or changing.
6. Never strike, hit, spank, tickle excessively, give back rubs, or push a child.
7. Do not isolate a child without proper adult supervision.
8. Never resort to physical punishment: no spanking, hitting, shaking, or forcibly holding a child. Do

- not make him/her run laps or do sit-ups. Never make a child walk somewhere without shoes or sit outside at night without proper clothing.
9. Do not invite an individual child to your home or to a room where no one sees you. Avoid any seclusion with a child for any reason!
 10. Always use the buddy system. Have another adult present in all activities, or have several children present with one adult, or notify another adult of your activities so that someone is always aware of what you are doing.
 11. When disciplining a child, seek help from other adults; always be in view of another adult, never touch the child. Stay calm and do not over react to a problem. Use the “time out” idea; remove yourself from the situation and then return to take care of the problem.
 12. If you have a recurring discipline problem, fill out a report about the problem, share it with your supervisor, state what measures have been taken to handle the problem, then date and sign your report.
 13. Never let your speech be derogatory to the children or other workers.
 14. When transporting children, be sure insurance is appropriate for the activity, and never drive one child at a time; always take a group and always have another adult present.
 15. If a child is uncooperative and refuses to be obedient, the child should be taken to his/her parent. If there is no parent available, a WABC adult will be responsible to be with the minor until he/she goes home.

Avoiding Negligence

We require that all volunteers and paid employees working in areas with children or young people to avoid negligence:

- a. In recruiting persons to work with children and youth
- b. In supervising those who are under their leadership
- c. In making reports to the proper authorities whenever there is reasonable grounds to believe that there has been child abuse

Summary

Child abuse is as old as the history of mankind. It has many ugly forms and is a problem of severe magnitude and shocking implications. The spiritual atmosphere which WABC attempts to provide may be one of the best deterrents possible. When, however, an instance of child abuse is suspected or reported, our leadership must do everything it can to help those in need as quickly and thoroughly as possible along the best spiritual and professional guidelines. That is why this position paper is available for your reading and compliance. Remember the words of the Apostle James: “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” (James 4:17 NASB) This paper is an attempt to state the right thing to do. Do not neglect its counsel. We must screen every worker carefully and will not involve anyone who seems to be a possible risk.

Note:

If there are any charges of abuse, discrimination, or other possible litigation issues, WABC workers are absolutely to avoid talking with the news media. Any media question should be directed to the pastors. It is also wise to avoid answering any questions when legal charges are lodged without the presence of legal counsel.

If you have any questions or need any help in understanding these instructions, please contact the Deacon of the Christian Education Ministry.

The position of WABC on the subject of child abuse has been authorized by the Board of Elders of WABC.

All forms are filed in the church office.