




Adventist Risk Management, Inc.



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How You Can Stop Sexual Abuse in Your Ministry

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Every 10 seconds a child abuse incident is reported in North America as stated by Childhelp, a nonprofit dedicated to helping victims of child abuse and neglect. As a parent of a two-year-old daughter, I am troubled when I look at the sinful world we live in. Although our churches and schools continue to be proactive in protecting children, we must remember the things we all can do to continue to provide a safe environment for children.

What is Sexual Misconduct?

Sexual misconduct perpetrators can be a person of any gender and can occur between people of the same or different gender. How can we minimize or even prevent sexual misconduct from happening?¹ By definition, sexual misconduct is any unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature that is committed without consent or by force, intimidation, coercion, or manipulation.

According to Childhelp, more than 3 million child abuse allegations are made to law enforcement in North America each year involving more than 6 million children.² Statistically speaking, our children are subject to abuse, and as leaders in the church, we must be ready to step up and help those in need. Here are a few ways you can combat the potential for sexual abuse events to occur in your ministry.

"As leaders in the church, we must be ready to step up and help those in need."

5 Ways You Can Protect Children from Sexual Abuse in Church or School

#1 Intervene on Behalf of Others

A bystander is a person who is present when an event takes place but is not directly involved. Bystanders might be present when sexual assault or abuse occurs, or they could witness the circumstances that lead up to these crimes. Most crimes are committed by someone the victim knows, and a bystander intervening may be the only way out of the situation. Many people see abuse or sexual misconduct taking place, but nothing is done or reported due to fear or lack of education on how to report an incident. Your actions matter! If you suspect that someone you know has been sexually assaulted, take action.

#2 Screen Your Volunteers

Protecting the children in our ministries is every leader's moral and ethical responsibility. To provide an added layer of protection around those who attend our churches and schools, the *North American Division (NAD) Working Policy*, Section FB20 includes language outlining the steps for the selection and screening of volunteers who work with children in Adventist churches and schools. According to this policy, all volunteers are required to participate in a screening procedure that includes personal references and a criminal background check before he or she begins to serve. Background checks for each person must be updated every three years.

The volunteer guidelines include:

- All adults over the age of 18 involved in any capacity with children and youth ministries and activities.
- All church ministry leaders and officers voted or appointed by the local church.
- Volunteers voted or appointed by the conference, union, or the NAD and its affiliates.
- All registered volunteers either from within or outside the NAD voted or appointed to serve in the territory.

#3 Always Have Visibility

Secluded rooms and areas with low visibility can be danger zones, creating the potential for abuse or bullying to take place. Minimize these danger zones by making sure to have visibility windows on all doors in your facility and be sure the visibility panes are not blocked or covered. Always lock rooms when they are not in use, so they are not accessible to others.

#4 Follow the "Two-Adult Rule"

To ensure there is always proper adult supervision, establish a "Two-Adult Rule" for all child and youth ministry activities and interactions. Two or more adult ministry leaders should be with children at all times. Whether it is an afterschool activity, a church Bible study, or any other situation, an adult should never be alone with a child or young person. Children should never be left without adult supervision.

#5 Always Provide Sufficient, Quality Supervision

Depending on the day or the activity, your ministry may work with a large group of children or a smaller group. In any case, it is essential to not only provide sufficient supervision but also to provide quality supervision. This means that the on-duty volunteer is engaged and paying attention to the children in his or her care. The volunteer should be alert and aware of any potential risks and be prepared to intervene. If you know you will be working with a large number of children, make sure the staff/leader to children ratio is sufficient to supervise the entire group. The team must be adequately trained to provide quality supervision for that designated day. Review steps to take should a staff member encounter inappropriate behavior occurring between children or between a staff member and a child.

Reporting Incidents of Sexual Misconduct

If there is an emergency child abuse situation, call 911. If it is not an emergency situation, report the abuse allegation immediately to the proper authorities.

If the allegation is against one of your employees or staff members, notify your conference, so they are aware of the situation. Place the employee on administrative leave until the investigation is complete and follow the policy for handling cases of abuse involving your ministry's personnel. If the allegation is against a volunteer, he or she should not continue the volunteer services until investigations are complete as well. This action protects the children under your care, the suspected abuser, and the church until the situation is resolved.

You Can Make a Difference

In many cases of abuse, the child involved may feel helpless or just not know what to do to get out of that situation. As a leader who works with children, you must stand up for those children and intervene on their behalf. With screening, training, and providing quality supervision, we can do much to protect our children from sexual abuse.

For more information on church safety and child protection, visit [ARM's Church Safety page](#).

Sources:

1. <https://opsmanual.uiowa.edu/students/sexual-misconduct-datingdomestic-violence-or-stalking-involving-students/definitions-and-1>

2. Child Abuse Statistics & Facts. ChildHelp.org. Accessed on August 3, 2015. <https://www.childhelp.org/child-abuse-statistics/>

<https://www.childhelp.org/history-of-childhelp/>
<https://www.rainn.org/articles/your-role-preventing-sexual-assault>

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